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Lu Hsun at fifty,
photographed in Shanghai in September 1930

SELECTED WORKS
OF LU HSUN

VOLUME ONE

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
PEKING 1956

Printed in the People's Republic of China

EDITOR'S NOTE

This selection of Lu Hsun's works includes stories, prose poems, reminiscences, polemical writing and essays dealing with many aspects of life and letters. It comprises four volumes, the last three of which contain selected essays.

Lu Hsun's works are exceedingly rich and varied. Outstanding as a writer of short stories, he is even greater as an essayist; and we value the brilliant ideas and art expressed in his sixteen volumes of essays even more than his short stories. Again, he was well-known as an authority on Chinese literature, who did pioneer work with his original and profound researches in this field.

Lu Hsun's studies on the history of Chinese literature have been omitted from this selection, as they are for specialists in this field. A part only of his essays is here, and his poems in the classical style as well as his letters have not been included.

These four volumes, however, are representative of Lu Hsun's writing during different periods of his career. From them the reader may gain a general picture of his mental development, and his great contribution to Chinese literature and culture.

Volume One contains selections from his short stories, prose poems and reminiscences.

The first nine short stories are taken from Lu Hsun's earliest collection of tales, *Call to Arms*, the preface to which is also presented here. The next seven stories are from his second volume of stories, *Wandering*.

“The Flight to the Moon” and “Forging the Sword” are from his third book of stories, *Old Tales Retold*.

The fourteen stories in *Call to Arms* were written between 1918 and 1922. The eleven stories in *Wandering* during 1924 and 1925. The eight stories in *Old Tales Retold* were based on ancient myths and legends; one of them was written in 1922, the two in this selection were written in 1926, and the others during 1934 and 1935. All Lu Hsun’s stories are contained in these three collections.

The nineteen prose poems are taken from *Wild Grass*, a collection of twenty-three pieces written between 1924 and 1926.

Of the nine reminiscences, the first seven come from *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, which contains ten essays written in 1926 dealing with Lu Hsun’s childhood and early youth. The remaining two essays, from *The Last Essays of Chieh-chieh-ting*, were written in 1936, the last year of his life.

A number of these selections have already been translated into various languages; but this is the first attempt at a systematic introduction of Lu Hsun in English.

LU HSUN: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

FENG HSUEH-FENG*

I

Lu Hsun, whose real name was Chou Shu-jen, was born on September 25, 1881, in Shaohsing in the province of Chekiang. He came of a scholar-official family. His grandfather, who was holding office in Peking at the time of Lu Hsun's birth, was thrown into prison when the boy reached his thirteenth year; and the family never recovered from this blow. Lu Hsun's father, a scholar who had received no official appointments, had always been a poor provider; moreover, he fell seriously ill about this time and remained an invalid till he died three years later. Because of this, Lu Hsun's family was reduced to poverty. His mother, however, was a capable woman. The daughter of a scholar, she was brought up in the country but taught herself to read, and her generosity and pluck remained a lasting inspiration to her son. Her maiden name was Lu, and it was from her that Lu Hsun derived his pen-name.

In his boyhood, all Lu Hsun's relatives were struck by his intelligence. He entered school at the age of six, and immediately began to study the ancient classics. He remained in Shaohsing until he was

* A contemporary Chinese writer.

seventeen, only leaving it once during all this time for a short stay in the country with one of his uncles. Lu Hsun read a great number of Chinese classics during these twelve years. Not only did he have a photographic memory, but he often hit upon a new interpretation of an old text and had the courage to challenge the established point of view and the traditional ethics of that feudal, patriarchal society. In addition to studying the orthodox classics and histories, he took a special interest in mythology, unofficial histories, miscellaneous essays and anecdotes.

Young Lu Hsun also took great delight in folk art: New Year pictures, tales and legends, religious processions and village opera. As a boy, we know, he loved painting. He collected picture albums and illustrated books, and used to trace the woodcuts in such albums and in old romances. He also drew cartoons.

One of the features of Lu Hsun's boyhood which greatly affected both his character and his writing was the fact that he was acquainted with the countryside and a number of his friends were the children of simple, honest peasants. As he grew older, Lu Hsun recalled these contacts and friendships as the best times in his life. In fact, they served as the significant beginning of his spiritual ties with the working people.

But, of course, what impelled Lu Hsun to take the path which led to revolution was the encroachment upon the country by foreign powers and the bankruptcy of Chinese feudalism.

Lu Hsun's boyhood coincided with a period of intensified imperialist aggression, when the Ching Dynasty was becoming more and more corrupt and impotent. In a vain effort to prolong its rule, it attempted to appease the foreign powers by yielding to them its own sovereignty and parts of its territory, while suppressing the patriotic resistance of the peo-

ple. Reduced to a semi-colonial status, China was in imminent danger of being partitioned by the imperialists.

Although Shaohsing was comparatively cut off from the outside world, it could not fail to be shaken by the general social crisis and the danger confronting the nation as a whole. The decline of Lu Hsun's scholar-official family, coinciding, as it did, with the intensified threat from abroad and the tottering of feudal rule, made the sensitive lad reflect not only upon the fate of those around him, but also upon that of his country. From the age of thirteen to seventeen, owing to his family's poverty and his father's illness, Lu Hsun became familiar with pawnshops and pharmacies: and the cold treatment he received left its mark upon him. He began to be conscious of the oppressive nature of a feudal, patriarchal society and, aware of its flaws and contradictions, he learned to hate and despise it. He did not want to follow in the steps of his grandfather or father, nor to become a clerk in the magistrate's yamen or a merchant, as did most of the sons of the impoverished gentry in Shaohsing. He insisted on taking a different path.

And so, when he was eighteen, with the eight dollars his mother had managed to raise for his fare, Lu Hsun left for Nanking to take the entrance examination for the Naval Academy, where no tuition fees were charged. He passed the examination, but was not satisfied with the institution. The following year he transferred to the School of Railways and Mines attached to the Kiangnan Army Academy, also in Nanking. This school did not satisfy him either; but here he became acquainted with the ideas of bourgeois reform and constitutional monarchy, and read a number of translations of modern literary and scientific works by foreign writers.

Lu Hsun was in Nanking for four years. His stay there coincided with the "Reform Movement of 1899" which aimed at setting up a constitutional monarchy, the anti-imperialist Boxer Uprising, the subsequent invasion of Peking in 1900 by the allied armies of eight imperialist powers, and the humiliating Boxer Protocol of 1901 which the invading powers imposed on China, when the country's fate hung in the balance. During these four years, Lu Hsun became convinced of the need for the whole nation to revolt against imperialism and the Ching Dynasty. The Chinese translation of Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* had a great influence on him at this period. It not only caused him to take Darwin's theory of evolution as his guide, but made him choose the study and promotion of science as his own revolutionary path.

In 1901, he graduated from the School of Railways and Mines, and the following year was awarded a government scholarship to study in Japan.

* * *

Directly Lu Hsun arrived in Japan, he became a more ardent patriot than ever. The anti-Manchu movement among Chinese students there was at its height, and Japan was preparing belligerently to become an imperialist power. Lu Hsun's bitter indignation at conditions in China made him determine to devote his life to his country. In his spare time he studied European science, philosophy and literature. It was also in Japan that he first discovered such revolutionary poets as Byron, Shelley, Heine, Pushkin, Lermontov, Mickiewicz and Petöfi, whose works he read in Japanese or, with more difficulty, in German.

Lu Hsun entered the Medical College at Sendai in the belief that medical science would aid the revolutionary movement in China. In less than two years,

however, something happened to change his mind. He saw a news-reel of the Russo-Japanese war which showed the tragic apathy of the oppressed Chinese. This incident shook him to his depths.

"After that," he wrote, "I felt that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they may be, can only serve to be made examples of, or to witness such futile spectacles; and it is not necessarily deplorable no matter how many of them die of illness. The most important thing, therefore, is to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I determined to promote a literary movement." This happened in 1906.

Although the literary magazine that he planned to publish in Tokyo between 1906 and 1907 never saw the light of day, essays written that year, such as *On the Demoniac Poets*, together with the translations he made in 1908 from Russian and other writers of eastern and northern Europe, formed an extremely important beginning to his career. In 1908, he joined the anti-Manchu revolutionary party, *Kuang Fu Hui*.

Thus, during these eight years in Japan, Lu Hsun became a convinced revolutionary democrat, and grew firm in his decision to use literature as a means to arouse his fellow-countrymen.

Lu Hsun returned to China in 1909, and taught physiology and chemistry in Chekiang Normal School and Shaohsing Middle School. Then came the revolution of 1911, which he welcomed with all his heart. He urged his students to work for it, and accepted the post of principal of Shaohsing Normal School. In 1912, after the establishment of the provisional government of the Chinese Republic, he was appointed a member of the Ministry of Education.

Very soon, however, he was disillusioned and began to go through a period of hard thinking and agonized groping in the dark.

The revolution of 1911 was highly significant, but it did not accomplish its historical mission, for it merely overthrew the Ching Dynasty, while imperialism and feudalism remained unshaken. State power passed into the hands of warlords and politicians of different cliques whom the imperialists utilized to intensify their assault upon China. Thus, with warlords establishing independent regimes, ceaseless civil war, and a scramble among the imperialist powers for spheres of influence, the semi-feudal, semi-colonial condition of the country became aggravated. In the sphere of ideas, a reactionary movement calling for a return to the past gained influence.

Lu Hsun's painful groping lasted till 1918, the eve of the well-known May Fourth Movement. He passed the whole of this period in Peking, except for two visits to his mother in Shaohsing, when what he saw of the increasing impoverishment of the countryside made a deep impression upon him.

During these years, while working at the Ministry of Education he was engaging at the same time in most valuable studies of Chinese culture — annotating and compiling certain classical texts, and doing research into old bronze and stone inscriptions. It was during this period that he edited the works of Chi Kang, a great poet and patriot of the third century A.D., who dared to oppose feudal tyrants and the rigid Confucian traditions, thus reflecting to some degree the aspirations of the people.

During this period, Lu Hsun also made a study of the Indian Buddhist classics translated into Chinese since the third century A.D.

Meantime great changes were taking place in the

country. The European and American powers were so busy fighting the First World War that they had to relax their grip on China. This enabled Chinese national capitalism to develop to a certain extent. At the same time, the October Revolution of 1917 caused a new revolutionary upsurge in China which, led by revolutionary intellectuals, was to develop into a thoroughgoing, anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle. This came to a head in the May Fourth Movement of 1919.

In April 1918, under the pen-name Lu Hsun he published his first short story, *A Madman's Diary*, written in the vernacular. This appeared in *New Youth*, a magazine which guided the cultural and democratic revolution. It was also the first magazine to introduce the ideas of the October Revolution and of Marxism-Leninism. At this time Lu Hsun also began to write penetrating, militant essays dealing with social problems. In 1923, the publication of his first volume of short stories, *Call to Arms*, which included such immortal works as *My Old Home* and *The True Story of Ah Q*, established his position in China as the father of the new literature.

All this time Lu Hsun was in close touch with young people. From 1920, he was a lecturer at Peking University and the National Teachers College. He edited a supplement to a daily paper, and helped young writers to establish several literary organizations. He spent much time reading the manuscripts of young writers, which he revised with great care; and he was visited by many young people and corresponded with many others. In 1925, he gave keen support to the students of Peking Women's Normal College, where he was concurrently a lecturer, in their opposition to the Minister of Education who had illegally dissolved the college. In 1926, when the northern warlord Tuan

Chi-jui massacred students on March 18, Lu Hsun assisted the students in practical ways, in addition to writing articles to support their cause. The battle he waged on the literary front and the guidance and help he gave young people made him one of the most beloved figures in Peking from 1924 to 1926.

In August 1926, when a high tide of revolution was sweeping over South China, he was forced to leave Peking by the reactionary warlord government. In this year his second collection of short stories, *Wandering*, was published. 1918-1926 was his first period of brilliant, prolific authorship. Prior to leaving Peking he had written, in addition to his short stories, four volumes of collected essays, one volume of prose poems, *Wild Grass*, and an *Outline History of Chinese Fiction*. Furthermore, in his translations, larger in bulk than his original writings, he had introduced to the reading public the literary theories of the Soviet Union and Blok's *Twelve*.

In August 1926, Lu Hsun accepted the professorship of literature at Amoy University; he resigned, however, in December of that year. In January 1927, he went to Canton where he became dean and concurrently head of the Chinese Language and Literature Department of Sun Yat-sen University. In April of that year, when Chiang Kai-shek betrayed the revolution and arrested and murdered Communists and other revolutionaries, a number of students of Sun Yat-sen University were seized and executed. In sharp protest Lu Hsun resigned from his post. Since his own life was now in danger in Canton, he left in October for Shanghai where he remained until his death, no longer teaching but devoting all his energies to literary work and literary movements.

In 1928, he founded the magazine *The Torrent*, and

began to study Marxism-Leninism and translate Marxist literary theory. At the same time, he began to draw closer to the Communist Party, taking part in the mass movements initiated by the Party. In 1928, for instance, he joined the Revolutionary Mutual Aid Society; in 1930, he was one of the founders of the China Freedom League. When the China League of Left Wing Writers was established in Shanghai in March 1930—a historic event in the revolutionary literary movement—Lu Hsun was one of its founders, and he remained its chief leader until 1936 when it was reorganized owing to changed conditions. In January 1933, he joined the China League for Civil Rights; and in May he went to the German Consulate in Shanghai and handed in a protest against the brutalities of the Nazis. He helped to organize the international anti-imperialist, anti-fascist conference in Shanghai, which, owing to the White Terror, had to be held in the strictest secrecy. In September, Vaillant-Couturier and others arrived to attend this conference, at which Madame Sun Yat-sen was the delegate for China; and although Lu Hsun was not present, he was one of the honorary chairmen. These were his chief political activities apart from his writing.

During the last ten years of his life, Lu Hsun wrote nine volumes of essays. He also completed a volume of short stories on historical subjects, and many more translations than in his first period. The most important of these were: *The Theory of Art* by Plekhanov and *The Theory of Art, Literature and Criticism* by Lunacharsky; Fadeyev's novel, *The Nineteen*; *October* by Yakovlev; two volumes of short stories by Furmanov and others; Gorky's *Russian Fairy Tales*, and Gogol's *Dead Souls*. He also introduced Serafimovitch's *Iron Stream*, Gladkov's *Cement*, Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, and Ivanov's *Armoured Train*.

It was during these ten years, too, that Lu Hsun introduced Soviet woodcuts and those of the German artist, Käthe Kollwitz, to the Chinese public. At the same time he encouraged and guided the new, revolutionary woodcut art in China.

A third of Lu Hsun's time during these years was taken up with editorial work for various magazines, with reading and revising the manuscripts of young writers, and answering their letters. He hardly ever rested. Even during his last illness in 1936, he went on reading manuscripts and writing prefaces for young writers, besides meticulously editing and publishing the writings and translations of Chu Chiu-pai, a leading Chinese Communist who had been murdered by the Kuomintang.

These ten years, moreover, saw the sanguinary rule of the White Terror, by means of which the Kuomintang hoped to encircle and wipe out the revolutionaries. Lu Hsun was able to associate with a few young people and one or two Communists only, whom he had to meet in secret. He was obliged to live in isolation, and was in hourly danger of arrest or assassination. Nevertheless, he fought to the end and continued to give unwavering leadership to progressive writers and artists. More than this, by keeping the cultural front going, he succeeded in smashing the Kuomintang's ten-year campaign to silence revolutionary writers.

The last articles to come from Lu Hsun's pen were published during his illness in July and August, 1936, and consisted of an open letter exposing the schemes of the Chinese Trotskyites to undermine the Communist Party's policy of a national united front against Japan, and an article accepting and advocating the policy of the Chinese Communist Party.

Although suffering from tuberculosis, till the last Lu

Hsun never spared himself. He died on October 19 in Shanghai.

II

As we see from Lu Hsun's life, when he began to write, he was already closely linked to the struggle for liberation of China's oppressed millions.

He first attracted attention with *A Madman's Diary*. In this story he appears as a great humanist, who uncompromisingly rejects the feudal system with its ideas and morality. His readers' response was immediate and enthusiastic. They agreed that this powerful protest against feudalism marked a new departure in Chinese literature. This was Lu Hsun's first piece of realist writing, and he went on to write many outstanding works in the same vein.

"As for why I wrote these stories," said Lu Hsun later, "I feel today as I did ten years ago, that I should write in the hope of enlightening my people, write about human life and the need to better it. . . . I drew most of my characters from those unfortunates in our abnormal society, because I wanted to expose certain evils, arouse attention to them and have them cured."

A Madman's Diary, *Kung I-chi*, *Medicine and Tomorrow*, as well as *My Old Home*, *The True Story of Ah Q*, and *The New Year's Sacrifice*, were all written with this in mind. The chief characters in these stories — the madman, Kung I-chi, Jun-tu, Ah Q and the rest — are all unfortunates in an abnormal society. Lu Hsun made a strong protest against their unhappy fate, and mercilessly exposed and attacked the forces that oppressed them, at the same time giving true expres-

sion to their wishes, demands and potential strength. He showed that the only way out was through changing society — through revolution.

For instance, in connection with his immortal work *The True Story of Ah Q*, Lu Hsun declared that he wanted to portray the "silent soul of the people" which for thousands of years "grew, faded and withered quietly like grass under a great rock." While portraying Ah Q-ism, Lu Hsun is above all pleading for Ah Q and others like him; and through Ah Q he lets readers see the age-long oppression of the Chinese people. It is here that he shows himself such a brilliant realist. He makes it clear that Ah Q's greatest failing is his habit of deceiving himself as well as others whenever he is defeated, by consoling himself with the thought that he has won a moral victory. This is defeatism. Moreover, not only does Ah Q often forget his enemies and oppressors, he takes revenge on people weaker than he is, assuming the airs of an oppressor himself. Lu Hsun shows us that this is simply the result of thousands of years of feudal rule and a hundred years of foreign aggression. Although the Chinese people have always resisted oppression and fought back, their many defeats have produced defeatism which, combined with the age-old teaching of the feudal ruling class — that a man should submit to his superiors — gave rise to Ah Q's method of winning moral victories, the Ah Q-ism which prevents him from facing up to his oppressors. This is what Lu Hsun tries most to reveal to his readers.

Another thing which Lu Hsun strives to make clear is that, in the continuous clash between Ah Q and his oppressors, Ah Q himself is torn between submission and revolt, and has always an urge to revolt. Ah Q, like all the oppressed, can liberate himself only by smashing his fetters — by revolution — and this

strength he does possess. Thus when the 1911 Revolution comes, Ah Q's fate is naturally linked with it; and the fact that he is forbidden to take part only proves that the revolution has failed. Ah Q's urge to revolt is still there; there still remains a revolutionary way out for him. This is Lu Hsun's conclusion.

The True Story of Ah Q gives us a picture of the 1911 Revolution, which failed because the peasants were not mobilized. While exposing and attacking the landlord class, Lu Hsun bitterly criticizes the bourgeoisie as well, which led the revolution. By publishing this story Lu Hsun draws the attention of the leaders of the May Fourth Movement to the historical lesson of the 1911 Revolution, indicates the way out, and voices the demands of the people as a whole, of whom the great majority and the most important economically are peasants.

The way out and the people's demands are pointed out as a prelude to hope and to a new life for China in *My Old Home*, written before *The True Story of Ah Q*. "I would not like them . . . to have a treadmill existence like mine," he writes, "nor to suffer like Jun-tu until they become stupefied, nor yet, like others, to devote all their energies to dissipation. They should have a new life, a life we have never experienced. . . . The earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made." This is the only conclusion Lu Hsun can reach after portraying honest Jun-tu, who has suffered so much owing to "many children, famines, taxes, soldiers, bandits, officials and landed gentry" that he has become like a wooden effigy. Jun-tu is typical of most Chinese peasants at that time. Though still inarticulate, they were the foundation and chief moving force of the democratic revolution. This story depicts the increasing bankruptcy of the country-

side during these years, and predicts the peasants' awakening and the imminence of revolution.

In another significant story, *The New Year's Sacrifice*, Lu Hsun sketches the life of an ordinary working woman. Hsiang Lin's Wife is trampled upon, cheated, insulted and abandoned; yet we see her innate goodness, courage and kindness. Because of her pluck, her faith in mankind and the dignity she has acquired, all her misfortunes and ill treatment cannot break her spirit; but finally the mental torture caused by feudal morality and superstition destroys her faith and sense of dignity, so that she goes to pieces. Through his deep insight into this woman's heart, Lu Hsun makes a profound analysis of society. He shows the layer upon layer of social pressure which surround this widow like a spider's web. The utterly inhuman Confucian morality, much of it pure superstition, is the focal point of all these pressures. This has power to kill secretly, and the landed gentry rely upon this force. These pressures have always seemed quite commonplace, and all the time Confucian morality and men like Fourth Master Lu have kept claiming their victims in secret. Countless women and young people perish in silence, unnoticed, not knowing who has killed them. The situation revealed here is more horrifying than that exposed in *A Madman's Diary*. At the end of this story, Lu Hsun's brilliant powers of observation are shown most clearly by his discovery that this woman who has shown such fortitude finally comes to doubt the existence of hell, refuses to go on submitting meekly to her lot, and takes her fate into her own hands.

These stories show Lu Hsun's fearlessness in facing reality and exposing abuses. In the effete China of those days, most men had suffered so much that they were no longer sensitive to pain; but Lu Hsun still heard the cry of agony in the hearts of the oppressed,

and felt impelled to express it. His exposure of evil is like a strong beam of light to awaken men. And although he writes soberly, and tries not to let himself be carried away, the more detached he appears the clearer his readers hear the cries of the wretched — cries which come to express awakening and revolt.

In all these stories, Lu Hsun entirely rejects the old way of life and the old society. Readers are convinced that only a complete social revolution can put an end to these evils and the people's agony. *A Madman's Diary*, *My Old Home*, *The True Story of Ah Q*, and *The New Year's Sacrifice* — all carry this message. This is also true of *Medicine*, which commemorates a revolutionary of the 1911 Revolution and throws light on the fundamental cause of its failure.

Lu Hsun describes not only the agony of the oppressed but also their potential strength, and many of his stories bring out the fine qualities of China's working people. Hsiang Lin's Wife and Mrs. Shan are good, kind, courageous women; and the decency of the rickshaw man in *An Incident* is used to debunk the importance of so-called affairs of state. In *The Divorce*, Lu Hsun describes the pluck of the country girl Ai-ku, though she cannot get the better of the powerful local gentry. In *In the Wine Shop*, to show up the colourless surroundings he describes a boatman's daughter, Ah Shun, and her passionate longing for beauty and happiness. Her heart, like her eyes, is as pure as "a cloudless night sky — the cloudless sky of the North when there is no wind." In *Village Opera* above all, with deep feeling and a fine poetic touch, Lu Hsun describes the goodness of country folk and the intelligence and spirit of their sons. In the same way he describes Jun-tu's childhood.

Lu Hsun also uses Chinese myths and legends as his themes. *Mending Heaven* portrays the inventiveness

of the ancient Chinese; *The Flight to the Moon* deals with the legendary archer Yi; *Pacifying the Flood* and *Against Aggression* show us the great Yu and Mo-tzu, hero and sage of ancient China; and *Forging the Sword* encourages the weak to revolt against tyrants and to take revenge.

Stories such as *In the Wine Shop*, *The Misanthrope* and *Regret for the Past* describe the disillusionment and struggles of intellectuals at that time. The integrity of characters like Lu Wei-fu, Wei Lien-shu, Chuan-sheng or Tzu-chun depends upon whether or not they believe that society can be reformed. Once they lose this faith, they cease to be true to themselves. Then they have to destroy themselves like Wei Lien-shu, deliberately compromise like Lu Wei-fu, or surrender like Tzu-chun, who goes home to die exposed to "the sternness of her father and the icy cold looks of bystanders." What makes them lose their faith? Lu Hsun's analysis is clear: Lu Wei-fu and Wei Lien-shu are men who were aroused by the tumultuous events preceding the 1911 Revolution. As young men they had the courage of the madman in *A Madman's Diary* who dared to trample on Mr. Ku's accounts, or the lunatic in *The Ever Burning Lamp* who dared to defy the old society by shouting "I want to set fire to it all!", they were comrades, too, of the young revolutionary in *Medicine*. Progressive intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century did in fact pin their hopes to the victory of the 1911 Revolution; but when they came up against all the forces of reaction which this revolution failed to sweep away, they grew disillusioned. This shows the weakness of these intellectuals. Unless these men who were so full of hope before 1911 learned a lesson from the failure of the revolution and linked their fate with that of people like Lao Chuan, who were beginning to become

aroused, there was nothing for them but despair. Chuan-sheng and Tzu-chun are two young people awakened by the May Fourth Movement. They fail because they depend only on their own little strength to oppose age-old social pressures. Thus Lu Hsun judged the ideals of intellectuals and young people according to their relationship with the people as a whole.

So Lu Hsun's standpoint and his motive in writing are clearly seen in his stories.

This is equally true of Lu Hsun's prose poems and reminiscences and, especially, his essays. The most moving passages in his reminiscences are his glowing descriptions of the charm, wisdom and interests in life of peasants and handicraft workers, and the folk art which they create. Most of the prose poems in *Wild Grass*, which describe Lu Hsun's feelings during his struggle against the imperialists and the northern warlords, reveal the courage of a revolutionary intellectual and his experiences in his fight against the powers of darkness. The way in which he conquered despair with hope is in strong contrast to Lu Wei-fu's disillusionment or Wei Lien-shu's self-destruction.

Lu Hsun's essays form the bulk and the most important part of his literary work.

The age in which he lived and his dogged fighting spirit made him look for other weapons besides the short story to enlarge the scope of his struggle on the literary front.

From the standpoint of a fighter as well as an artist, Lu Hsun explained why he adopted the essay form. "Some people have tried to persuade me not to write these short, critical essays," he said. "I am very grateful for their concern, and I know that writing stories is important. But there comes a time when I have to write in a certain way. And it seems to me if there are such troublesome taboos in the palace of art, I

would do better not to enter it, but to stand in the desert and watch the sandstorms, laughing when I am happy, shouting when I am sad, and cursing openly when I am angry. The sand and stones may bruise me till my body is torn and bleeding, but from time to time I can finger the clotted blood and feel the pattern of my bruises; and this is not less interesting than following the example of the Chinese literati who eat foreign bread and butter in the name of keeping Shakespeare company."

So Lu Hsun broke through the existing literary taboos and enlarged the sphere of ideological struggle, creating the "daggers" and "javelins" which he needed in the form of these essays, which he used to fight a way out for himself and his readers at a time when "wind and sand lash your face, and wolves and tigers prowl."

In 1918, a few months after he published his first short story, he wrote *My Views on Chastity and Sut-teeism*. From then until his death, he wrote six to seven hundred essays, which provided him with an immense arena, through which he could gallop freely as a pioneer thinker and fighter and give full expression to his artistic genius.

Lu Hsun needed a vast arena because he considered his mission was to "settle old scores and blaze a new trail." He had to have space to observe and analyse every aspect of history and society, to probe into every corner of men's lives, to tear off all disguises, and to attack all enemies he discovered.

The content of these essays is so diverse as to be virtually all-embracing, ranging from fundamental problems of the revolution to such topics as children's toys. He waged innumerable battles and attacked innumerable enemies: imperialists, warlords, Kuomintang die-hards, the men who advocated a return to the

past, reactionary writers, "those who trade in revolution," "murderers of the present and future," and "preachers of death." He turned his attention to this great variety of topics because he wanted to indicate and break through to a new way of life for the Chinese people — the democratic revolution which was being carried through, and the socialist revolution which was to follow. Lu Hsun pointed out that Chinese history from time immemorial was filled with "feasts of human flesh" for the rulers and foreign aggressors, because two fates only were possible for the people the oppressors "ate." Either it was "a period when they were not even treated as proper slaves," or "a period when they were treated as proper slaves for the time being." So it was necessary to "sweep away the man-eaters, overturn the feasters' tables, and tear down the kitchen," to "create a third type of period hitherto unknown in Chinese history." Thus he said, "Now our most important aims are: first, to exist; secondly, to find food and clothing; thirdly, to move forward. Any impediment to these aims must be trampled down, whether it is ancient or modern, human or supernatural, ancient canon, rare text, sacred oracle, precious idol, traditional recipe or secret nostrum." And finally he declared, "The facts show that the rising proletariat alone will possess the future." Hence he proposes to use "the roaring storm of proletarian revolution" to "sweep clean our land" and clear away all that is "stagnant, vile and rotten." He was for the Soviet Union and hoped that China would also have a socialist society, because he wanted the oppressed to live "like human beings," and "a brand-new, totally unknown social system to emerge from the depth of hell," so that "hundreds of millions of people might become the masters of their own fate."

It is clear then that the goal which Lu Hsun tried

to express and strove for in his stories became more sharply defined in his essays, and he became more confident of its attainment. His important historical role, his great stature, his contribution to political thought and to art, are much more vividly reflected in his essays than in his short stories. Turning his back on the past, he looks towards the future of the people and of China. Except to "strike a blow at the enemy behind" he never looked back. No power on earth could make him compromise; no obstruction could stop his advance. He was firmly convinced that the old society and old way of life, with all that was rotten in them, must inevitably perish; and a new society and new way of life must inevitably triumph.

The class struggle and revolutionary problems of these years are also reflected more accurately and comprehensively in the essays than in the stories. In these essays, Lu Hsun's artistic genius expanded more freely and characteristically in step with his activities and mental development as a revolutionary. The enemies of the people whom he satirizes here are too many to count. And he paints vivid and splendid pictures of the people's heroes, ranging from those of past ages who were "the backbone of China," to the young revolutionaries of his time who fought on undaunted through a hail of bullets, and the Communists "with their feet planted firmly on the ground, who battled and shed their blood for the survival of this generation of Chinese." Almost every one of these essays bears the imprint of a brilliant mind, and each is clearly the handiwork of a genius in the creation of types and a master of satirical writing; while readers are moved by the passion of a true champion of the people, with his burning love and hate, his blazing anger, and dauntless, invincible might.

It was as a great essayist with his own distinctive

style that Lu Hsun became an outstanding polemicist, and a giant in China's cultural revolution who dwarfed all his predecessors.

The foregoing is a general account of Lu Hsun's writings — short stories, essays, prose poems and reminiscences. After choosing to be a writer, he transformed himself from an ordinary lover of humanity who wanted to cure the diseased into a great humanist who strove to serve all the oppressed. He searched and fought for a way to free humble folk like Lao Chuan, Jun-tu, Ah Q and Hsiang Lin's Wife from their wretched fate. He proved loyal to his purpose, advancing in the cause of the revolution. And as soon as he took this road, he was bathed in the light of China's future liberation, and his genius constantly received new life from the infinite creative powers of the people.

Lu Hsun's sixteen volumes of essays and three collections of stories, prose poems and reminiscences form an encyclopaedia of Chinese society, the people's life and struggles, and the lessons drawn from these during the great historical period from the beginning of the twentieth century to the thirties. They constitute, above all, a bold declaration of war against imperialism and feudalism, against all oppressors of the people, and all the dark, corrupt forces which would obstruct China's advance. Lu Hsun's brilliant works give us the most comprehensive and profound reflection of conditions from the time of the 1911 Revolution, through the May Fourth Movement and the first and second revolutionary wars.

Throughout this period, Lu Hsun remained the central figure and chief representative of the new literature. The realist approach and theory of art which he introduced to modern Chinese writers were a weapon to reject the old and affirm the new, a way to bring

new aesthetic criteria into writing. His own work and his partisanship of socialist realist literature during his later years marked a new stage of development in modern Chinese writing.

Lu Hsun's style is distinctively and superbly his own, yet at the same time unmistakably Chinese. He worked for a renaissance in Chinese literature, and because he based his renovations on popular demands he was the firmest supporter of and greatest heir to the best traditions in Chinese literature, with its long and glorious history. From Lu Hsun's taste and style we can see the wisdom, taste and style of the Chinese working people.

With his roots deep in Chinese culture and with a reformer's zeal, he read widely in foreign literature. His works show the influence of foreign, especially Russian writers — of Gogol in particular, and thus linked Chinese literature with the progressive trends of modern world literature. The way in which Lu Hsun assimilated foreign literary influences and made them a part of China's national culture was of historic significance. He achieved this through his own writing. For instance, of his earliest work, *A Madman's Diary*, he wrote: "I relied on the hundred-odd foreign books I had read and a smattering of medical knowledge. . . . In 1834, the Russian Gogol wrote a *Madman's Diary* . . . but this later *Madman's Diary* aims at exposing the abuses of the clan system and Confucian morality, and its indignation goes deeper than Gogol's."

Lu Hsun has also explained how his desire to enlighten people impelled him to look for suitable means of expression in traditional Chinese art forms, and how this influenced his style. "I do my best to avoid wordiness," he said. "I try to convey my meaning without any frills. Chinese opera dispenses with

scenery, and the New Year pictures sold to children show a few main figures only. I firmly believe that such methods suit my purpose; so I do not indulge in irrelevant details, or make my dialogue too long."

The scope and profundity of Lu Hsun's thought are paralleled in his art, giving evidence of the most penetrating observation of Chinese society and culture, and the closest links with the people. To describe events or people, Lu Hsun uses a method he calls "drawing the eyes," which implies conveying the spirit of a thing with the utmost conciseness and refinement.

"I forget who first said this," he wrote, "but the best way to convey a man's character with a minimum of strokes is to draw his eyes. This is absolutely correct. If you draw all the hairs of his head, no matter how painstakingly and accurately, it will not be very much use." So the salient feature of his style is the accuracy, penetration and vividness with which he depicts a thing, often in a minimum of words. With a few strokes he brings out a man's chief characteristics. Lu Hsun also expresses ideas by means of concrete images, equally penetrating, vivid and compact. With a few sentences, or just one sentence, he can get to the heart of a matter and convey its innermost meaning. This conciseness and refinement, typical of Lu Hsun's language, are precisely the most striking characteristic of traditional Chinese poetry and prose.

Lu Hsun's vocabulary is very rich. He paid great attention to language. "My writing must be easy to read," he once said. "If there is no suitable vernacular expression, I frequently use some ancient saying, and hope that some readers will understand it. I do not often use phrases made up out of my own head, which only I, or not even I, can understand." The chief source of his language was the living vernacular of the

people, their idioms and colloquialisms, and certain tags from old books and classical allusions; sometimes he also uses expressions translated from foreign words, as well as foreign syntax. Lu Hsun's writings enriched the Chinese language and developed such good features as its conciseness, strength, vividness and wittiness.

Lu Hsun's satire is simply the most concise delineation and criticism of the dark side of society. "The life of satire is truth," he said. "There can be no satire without a portrayal of the truth." And he put these ideas into practice. His satire is forceful and irresistible, precisely because it gives a true reflection of reality. His satire, combined with his "dagger and javelin" tactics, his fierceness in attacking the enemy, his boldness in analysing and exposing the forces of evil, becomes even more trenchant and sharp. Whatever disguise the enemy may assume, he cannot escape Lu Hsun's javelin or the surgeon's knife with which he calmly dissects a man's heart. Lu Hsun's satire is cool yet full of passion, sharp yet strong. He maintained that satire must be honest, and at the same time utterly opposed the cynicism which "serves only to make readers feel there is nothing good in the world and nothing can be done about it." In Lu Hsun's satire we can find the simple humour and mockery common to Chinese peasants and folk literature. We can also recognize in him the successor of the satirists in classical Chinese literature. Lu Hsun's genius in this field alone wins him an outstanding place in the history of Chinese literature. He developed the humorous wisdom of the Chinese people, and the satiric tradition of both classical and folk literature.

Finally, as a figure in world literature, Lu Hsun is distinguished by his close links with the working people of China, and the profoundly Chinese features of his writing.

CONTENTS

STORIES

PREFACE TO THE FIRST COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES, "CALL TO ARMS"	1
A MADMAN'S DIARY	8
KUNG I-CHI	22
MEDICINE	29
TOMORROW	40
AN INCIDENT	49
STORM IN A TEACUP	52
MY OLD HOME	63
THE TRUE STORY OF AH Q	76
VILLAGE OPERA	136
THE NEW YEAR'S SACRIFICE	150
IN THE WINE SHOP	174
A HAPPY FAMILY	188
SOAP	198
THE MISANTHROPE	212
REGRET FOR THE PAST	238
THE DIVORCE	262
THE FLIGHT TO THE MOON	274
FORGING THE SWORD	288

PROSE POEMS

AUTUMN NIGHT	313
THE SHADOW'S LEAVETAKING	316
THE BEGGARS	318
REVENGE	320

HOPE	322
SNOW	324
THE KITE	326
THE GOOD STORY	329
THE PASSER-BY	332
DEAD FIRE	339
THE DOG'S RETORT	342
THE GOOD HELL THAT WAS LOST	343
ON EXPRESSING AN OPINION	345
AFTER DEATH	346
SUCH A FIGHTER	351
THE WISE MAN, THE FOOL AND THE SLAVE	353
THE BLIGHTED LEAF	356
AMID PALE BLOODSTAINS	358
THE AWAKENING	360

REMINISCENCES

AH CHANG AND THE "BOOK OF HILLS AND SEAS"	363
THE FAIR OF THE FIVE FIERCE GODS	371
WU CHANG, OR LIFE-IS-TRANSIENT	377
FROM HUNDRED PLANT GARDEN TO THREE FLAVOUR STUDY	387
FATHER'S ILLNESS	394
MR. FUJINO	402
FAN AI-NUNG	410
MY FIRST TEACHER	422
THE HANGING WOMAN	432

PREFACE TO THE FIRST COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES, "CALL TO ARMS"

When I was young I, too, had many dreams. Most of them came to be forgotten, but I see nothing in this to regret. For although recalling the past may make you happy, it may sometimes also make you lonely, and there is no point in clinging in spirit to lonely by-gone days. However, my trouble is that I cannot forget completely, and these stories have resulted from what I have been unable to erase from my memory.

For more than four years I used to go, almost daily, to a pawnbroker's and medicine shop. I cannot remember how old I was then; but the counter in the medicine shop was the same height as I, and that in the pawnbroker's twice my height. I used to hand clothes and trinkets up to the counter twice my height, take the money proffered with contempt, then go to the counter the same height as I to buy medicine for my father who had long been ill. On my return home I had other things to keep me busy, for since the physician who made out the prescriptions was very well-known, he used unusual drugs: aloe root dug up in winter, sugar-cane that had been three years exposed to frost, twin crickets, and *Ardisia* . . . all of which were difficult to procure. But my father's illness went from bad to worse until he died.

I believe those who sink from prosperity to poverty will probably come, in the process, to understand what

the world is really like. I wanted to go to K—school in N—,* perhaps because I was in search of a change of scene and faces. There was nothing for my mother but to raise eight dollars for my travelling expenses, and say I might do as I pleased. That she cried was only natural, for at that time the proper thing was to study the classics and take the official examinations. Anyone who studied “foreign subjects” was looked down upon as a fellow good for nothing, and forced to sell his soul to foreign devils out of desperation. Besides, she was sorry to part with me. But in spite of that, I went to N— and entered K— school; and it was there that I heard for the first time the names of such subjects as natural science, arithmetic, geography, history, drawing and physical training. They had no physiology course, but we saw wood-block editions of such works as *A New Course on the Human Body* and *Essays on Chemistry and Hygiene*. Recalling the talk and prescriptions of physicians I had known and comparing them with what I now knew. I came to the conclusion those physicians must be either unwitting or deliberate charlatans; and I began to sympathize with the invalids and families who suffered at their hands. From translated histories I also learned that the Japanese Reformation had originated, to a great extent, with the introduction of Western medical science to Japan.

These inklings took me to a provincial medical college in Japan. I dreamed a beautiful dream that on my return to China I would cure patients like my father, who had been wrongly treated, while if war broke out I would serve as an army doctor, at the same time strengthening my countrymen’s faith in reformation.

* The Kiangnan Naval Academy in Nanking.

I do not know what advanced methods are now used to teach microbiology, but at that time lantern slides were used to show the microbes; and if the lecture ended early, the instructor might show slides of natural scenery or news to fill up the time. This was during the Russo-Japanese War, so there were many war films, and I had to join in the clapping and cheering in the lecture hall along with the other students. It was a long time since I had seen any compatriots, but one day I saw a film showing some Chinese, one of whom was bound, while many others stood around him. They were all strong fellows but appeared completely apathetic. According to the commentary, the one with his hands bound was a spy working for the Russians, who was to have his head cut off by the Japanese military as a warning to others, while the Chinese beside him had come to enjoy the spectacle.

Before the term was over I had left for Tokyo, because after this film I felt that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they may be, can only serve to be made examples of, or to witness such futile spectacles; and it is not necessarily deplorable no matter how many of them die of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I determined to promote a literary movement. There were many Chinese students in Tokyo studying law, political science, physics and chemistry, even police work and engineering, but not one studying literature or art. However, even in this uncongenial atmosphere I was fortunate enough to find some kindred spirits. We gathered the few others we needed, and after discussion our first step, of course, was to publish a magazine, the title of which denoted

that this was a new birth. As we were then rather classically inclined, we called it Hsin Sheng (New Life).

When the time for publication drew near, some of our contributors dropped out, and then our funds were withdrawn, until finally there were only three of us left, and we were penniless. Since we had started our magazine at an unlucky hour, there was naturally no one to whom we could complain when we failed; but later even we three were destined to part, and our discussions of a dream future had to cease. So ended this abortive "New Life."

Only later did I feel the futility of it all; at that time I did not really understand anything. Later I felt if a man's proposals met with approval, it should encourage him; if they met with opposition, it should make him fight back; but the real tragedy for him was to lift up his voice among the living and meet with no response, neither approval nor opposition, just as if he were left helpless in a boundless desert. So I began to feel lonely.

And this feeling of loneliness grew day by day, coiling about my soul like a huge poisonous snake.

But in spite of my unaccountable sadness, I felt no indignation; for this experience had made me reflect and see that I was definitely not the heroic type who could rally multitudes at his call.

However, my loneliness had to be dispelled, for it was causing me agony. So I used various means to dull my senses, both by conforming to the spirit of the time and turning to the past. Later I experienced or witnessed even greater loneliness and sadness, which I do not like to recall, preferring that it should perish with me. Still my attempt to deaden my senses was not unsuccessful—I had lost the enthusiasm and fervour of my youth.



The Shaohsing Hostel where Lu Hsun stayed in Peking from 1912 to 1918

In S—* Hostel there were three rooms where it was said a woman had hanged herself on the locust tree in the courtyard. Although the tree had grown so tall that one could no longer reach its branches, the rooms remained deserted. For some years I stayed here, copying ancient inscriptions. I had few visitors, there were no political problems or issues in those inscriptions, and my only desire was that my life should slip quietly away like this. On summer nights, when there were too many mosquitoes, I would sit under the locust tree, waving my fan and looking at the specks of sky through the thick leaves, while the caterpillars which came out in the evening would fall, icy-cold, on to my neck.

The only visitor to come for an occasional talk was my old friend Chin Hsin-yi. He would put his big portfolio down on the broken table, take off his long gown, and sit facing me, looking as if his heart was still beating fast after braving the dogs.

"What is the use of copying these?" he demanded inquisitively one night, after looking through the inscriptions I had copied.

"No use at all."

"Then why copy them?"

"For no particular reason."

"I think, you might write something. . . ."

I understood. They were editing the magazine "New Youth,"** but hitherto there seemed to have been no reaction, favourable or otherwise, and I guessed they must be feeling lonely. However I said:

"Imagine an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible, with many people fast asleep inside

* Shaohsing.

** The most influential magazine in the cultural revolution of that time.

who will soon die of suffocation. But you know since they will die in their sleep, they will not feel any of the pain of death. Now if you cry aloud to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making those unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you think you are doing them a good turn?"

"But since a few have awoken, you can't say there is no hope of destroying the iron house."

True, in spite of my own conviction, I could not blot out hope, for hope lies in the future. I could not use my own evidence to refute his assertion that it might exist. So I agreed to write, and the result was my first story, *A Madman's Diary*. From that time onwards, I could not stop writing, and would write some sort of short story from time to time at the request of friends, until I had more than a dozen of them.

As for myself, I no longer feel any great urge to express myself; yet, perhaps because I have not entirely forgotten the grief of my past loneliness, I sometimes call out, to encourage those fighters who are galloping on in loneliness, so that they do not lose heart. Whether my cry is brave or sad, repellent or ridiculous, I do not care. However, since it is a call to arms, I must naturally obey my general's orders. This is why I often resort to innuendoes, as when I made a wreath appear from nowhere at the son's grave in *Medicine*, while in *Tomorrow* I did not say that Fourth Shan's Wife had no dreams of her little boy. For our chiefs then were against pessimism. And I, for my part, did not want to infect with the loneliness I had found so bitter those young people who were still dreaming pleasant dreams, just as I had done when young.

It is clear, then, that my short stories fall far short of being works of art; hence I count myself fortunate that they are still known as stories, and are even be-

ing compiled in one book. Although such good fortune makes me uneasy, I am nevertheless pleased to think they have readers in the world of men, for the time being at least.

Since these short stories of mine are being reprinted in one collection, owing to the reasons given above, I have chosen the title "Na Han" (Call to Arms).

December 3, 1922, Peking

A MADMAN'S DIARY

Two brothers, whose names I need not mention here, were both good friends of mine in high school; but after a separation of many years we gradually lost touch. Some time ago I happened to hear that one of them was seriously ill, and since I was going back to my old home I broke my journey to call on them. I saw only one of them, however, who told me that the invalid was his younger brother.

"I appreciate your coming such a long way to see us," he said, "but he recovered some time ago and has gone elsewhere to take up an official post." Then, laughing, he produced two volumes of his brother's diary, saying that from these the nature of his past illness could be seen, and that there was no harm in showing them to an old friend. I took the diary away and read it through, and found that he had suffered from a form of persecution complex. The writing was most confused and incoherent, and he had made many wild statements; moreover he had omitted to give any dates, so that only by the colour of the ink and the differences in the writing could one tell that it was not written at one time. Certain sections, however, were not altogether disconnected, and I have copied out a part to serve as a subject for medical research. I have not altered a single illogicality in the diary and have changed only the names, even though the people referred to are all country folk, unknown

to the world and of no consequence. As for the title, it was chosen by the diarist himself after his recovery, and I did not change it.

Tonight the moon is very bright.

I have not seen it for over thirty years, so today when I saw it I felt in unusually high spirits. I begin to realize that during the past thirty odd years I have been in the dark; but now I must be extremely careful. Otherwise why should that dog at the Chao house have looked at me twice?

I have reason for my fear.

Tonight there is no moon at all, I know that this bodes ill. This morning when I went out cautiously, Mr. Chao had a strange look in his eyes, as if he were afraid of me, as if he wanted to murder me. There were also seven or eight others, who discussed me in a whisper. And they were afraid of my seeing them. All the people I passed were like that. The fiercest among them grinned at me; whereupon I shivered from head to foot, knowing that their preparations were complete.

I was not afraid, however, but continued on my way. A group of children in front were also discussing me, and the look in their eyes was just like that in Mr. Chao's, while their faces too were ghastly pale. I wondered what grudge these children could have against me to make them behave like this. I could not help calling out: "Tell me!" But then they ran away.

I wonder what grudge Mr. Chao can have against me, what grudge the people on the road can have against me. I can think of nothing except that twenty years ago I trod on Mr. Ku Chiu's* account sheets for

* Ku Chiu means "Ancient Times." Lu Hsun had in mind the long history of feudal oppression in China.

many years past, and Mr. Ku was very displeased. Although Mr. Chao does not know him, he must have heard talk of this and decided to avenge him, so he is conspiring with the people on the road against me. But then what of the children? At that time they were not yet born, so why should they have eyed me so strangely today, as if they were afraid of me, as if they wanted to murder me? This really frightens me, it is so bewildering and upsetting.

I know. They must have learnt this from their parents!

I can't sleep at night. Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it.

Those people—some of them have been pilloried by the magistrate, some slapped in the face by the local gentry, some have had their wives taken away by bailiffs, some have had their parents driven to suicide by creditors; yet they never looked as frightened and as fierce then as they did yesterday.

The most extraordinary thing was that woman on the street yesterday who was spanking her son and saying, "Little devil! I'd like to bite several mouthfuls out of you to work off my feelings!" Yet all the time she was looking at me. I gave a start, unable to control myself; then all those green-faced, long-toothed people began to laugh derisively. Old Chen hurried forward and dragged me home.

He dragged me home. The folk at home all pretended not to know me; they had the same look in their eyes as all the others. When I went into the study, they locked the door outside as if cooping up a chicken or a duck. This incident left me even more bewildered.

A few days ago a tenant of ours from Wolf Cub Village came to report the failure of the crops, and told my elder brother that a notorious character in

their village had been beaten to death; then some people had taken out his heart and liver, fried them in oil and eaten them, as a means of increasing their courage. When I interrupted, the tenant and my brother both stared at me. Only today have I realized that they had exactly the same look in their eyes as those people outside.

Just to think of it sets me shivering from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet.

They eat human beings, so they may eat me.

I see that woman's "bite several mouthfuls out of you," the laughter of those green-faced, long-toothed people and the tenant's story the other day are obviously secret signs. I realize all the poison in their speech, all the daggers in their laughter. Their teeth are white and glistening: they are all man-eaters.

It seems to me, although I am not a bad man, ever since I trod on Mr. Ku's accounts it has been touch-and-go. They seem to have secrets which I cannot guess, and once they are angry they will call anyone a bad character. I remember when my elder brother taught me to write compositions, no matter how good a man was, if I produced arguments to the contrary he would mark that passage to show approval; while if I excused evil-doers, he would say: "Good for you, that shows originality." How can I possibly guess their secret thoughts—especially when they are ready to eat people?

Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it. In ancient times, as I recollect, people often ate human beings, but I am rather hazy about it. I tried to look this up, but my history has no chronology, and scrawled all over each page are the words: "Virtue and Morality." Since I could not sleep anyway, I read hard half the night, until I began to

see words between the lines, the whole book being filled with the two words—"Eat people."

All these words written in the book, all the words spoken by our tenant, gaze at me strangely with an enigmatic smile.

I too am a man, and they want to eat me!

In the morning I sat quietly for some time. Old Chen brought lunch in: one bowl of vegetables, one bowl of steamed fish. The eyes of the fish were white and hard, and its mouth was open just like those people who want to eat human beings. After a few mouthfuls I could not tell whether the slippery morsels were fish or human flesh, so I brought it all up.

I said, "Old Chen, tell my brother that I am feeling quite suffocated, and want to have a stroll in the garden." Old Chen said nothing but went out, and presently he came back and opened the gate.

I did not move, watching to see how they would treat me, knowing that they certainly would not let me go. Sure enough! My elder brother came slowly out, leading an old man. There was a murderous gleam in his eyes, and fearing that I would see it he lowered his head, stealing glances at me from the side of his spectacles.

"You seem to be very well today," said my brother.

"Yes," said I.

"I have invited Mr. Ho here today," said my brother, "to examine you."

"All right," said I. But actually I know quite well that this old man was the executioner in disguise! He was simply using the pretext of feeling my pulse to see how fat I was; for by so doing he would be given a share of my flesh. Still I was not afraid. Although I do not eat men, my courage is greater than theirs. I held out my two fists, watching what he

would do. The old man sat down, closed his eyes, fumbled for some time and remained still for some time; then he opened his shifty eyes and said, "Don't let your imagination run away with you. Rest quietly for a few days, and you will be all right."

Don't let your imagination run away with you! Rest quietly for a few days! When I have grown fat, naturally they will have more to eat; but what good will it do me, or how can it be "all right"? All these people wanting to eat human flesh and at the same time stealthily trying to keep up appearances, not daring to act promptly, really made me nearly die of laughter. I could not help roaring with laughter, I felt so amused. I knew that in this laughter were courage and integrity. Both the old man and my brother turned pale, awed by my courage and integrity.

But just because I am brave they are the more eager to eat me, in order to acquire some of my courage. The old man went out of the gate, but before he had gone far he said to my brother in a low voice, "To be eaten at once!" And my brother nodded. So you are in it too! This stupendous discovery, although it came as a shock, is yet no more than I had expected: the accomplice in eating me is my elder brother!

The eater of human flesh is my elder brother!

I am the younger brother of an eater of human flesh!

I myself will be eaten by others, but none the less I am the younger brother of an eater of human flesh!

These few days I have been thinking again: suppose that old man were not an executioner in disguise, but a real doctor; he would be none the less an eater of human flesh. In that book on herbs, written by his

predecessor Li Shih-chen,* it is clearly stated that men's flesh can be boiled and eaten; so can he still say that he does not eat men?

As for my elder brother, I have also good reason to suspect him. When he was teaching me, he said with his own lips, "People exchange their sons to eat."** And once, in discussing a bad man, he said that not only did he deserve to be killed, he should "have his flesh eaten and his hide slept on."** I was still young then, and my heart beat faster for some time. And he was not at all surprised by the story about eating a man's heart and liver that our tenant from Wolf Cub Village told us the other day, but kept nodding his head. He is evidently just as cruel as before. Since it is possible to "exchange sons to eat," then anything can be exchanged, anyone can be eaten. In the past I simply listened to his explanations, and let it go at that; now I know that when he was explaining to me, not only was there human oil at the corner of his lips, but his whole heart was set on eating men.

Pitch dark. I don't know whether it is day or night. The Chao family dog has started barking again.

The fierceness of a lion, the timidity of a rabbit, the craftiness of a fox. . . .

I know their way; they are not willing to kill anyone outright, nor do they dare, for fear of the consequences. So they have all banded together and set traps everywhere, to force me to kill myself. Just look at the behaviour of the men and women in the street a few days ago, and my elder brother's attitude

* A famous pharmacologist (1518-1593), author of *Pen-tsao-kang-mu*, the *Materia Medica*.

** These are quotations from the old classic, *Tso Chuan*.

these last few days, it is quite obvious. What they like best is for a man to take off his belt, and hang himself from a beam; for then they can enjoy their heart's desire without being blamed for murder. Naturally that sets them roaring with delighted laughter. On the other hand, if a man is frightened or worried to death, although that makes him rather thin, they still nod in approval.

They will only eat dead flesh! I remember reading somewhere of a hideous beast, with an ugly look in its eye, called "hyena" which often eats dead flesh. Even the largest bones it grinds into fragments and swallows: the mere thought of this is enough to terrify one. Hyenas are related to wolves, and wolves belong to the canine species. The other day the dog in the Chao house looked at me several times; obviously it is in the plot too and has become their accomplice. The old man's eyes were cast down, but how could that deceive me!

The most deplorable is my elder brother. He is also a man, so why is he not afraid, why is he plotting with others to eat me? Is it that when one is used to it he no longer thinks it a crime? Or is it that he has hardened his heart to do something he knows is wrong?

In cursing man-eaters, I shall start with my brother, and in dissuading man-eaters, I shall start with him too.

Actually, such arguments should have convinced them long ago. . . .

Suddenly someone came in. He was only about twenty years old and I did not see his features very clearly. His face was wreathed in smiles, and when he nodded to me his smile did not seem genuine. Then I asked him: "Is it right to eat human beings?"

Still smiling, he replied, "When there is no famine how can one eat human beings?"

I realized at once, he was one of them; but still I summoned up courage to repeat my question:

"Is it right?"

"What makes you ask such a thing? You really are . . . fond of a joke. . . . It is very fine today."

"It is fine, and the moon is very bright. But I want to ask you: Is it right?"

He looked disconcerted, and muttered: "No. . . ."

"No? Then why do they still do it?"

"What are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about? They are eating men now in Wolf Cub Village, and you can see it written all over the books, in fresh red ink."

His expression changed, and he grew ghastly pale. "It may be so," he said, staring at me. "It has always been like that. . . ."

"Is it right because it has always been like that?"

"I refuse to discuss these things with you. Anyway, you shouldn't talk about it. Whoever talks about it is in the wrong!"

I leapt up and opened my eyes wide, but the man had vanished. I was soaked with perspiration. He was much younger than my elder brother, but even so he was in it. He must have been taught by his parents. And I am afraid he has already taught his son: that is why even the children look at me so fiercely.

Wanting to eat men, at the same time afraid of being eaten themselves, they all look at each other with the deepest suspicion. . . .

How comfortable life would be for them if they could get rid of such obsessions and go to work, walk, eat and sleep at ease. They have only this one step

to take. And yet fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers, friends, teachers and students, sworn enemies and even strangers, have all joined in this conspiracy, discouraging and preventing each other from taking this step.

Early this morning I went to look for my elder brother. He was standing outside the hall door looking at the sky, when I walked up behind him, stood between him and the door, and with exceptional poise and politeness said to him:

"Brother, I have something to say to you."

"Well, what is it?" said he, quickly turning towards me and nodding.

"It is very little, but I find it difficult to say. Brother, probably all primitive people ate a little human flesh to begin with. Later, because their outlook changed, some of them stopped, and because they tried to be good they changed into men, changed into real men. But some are still eating—just like reptiles: some have changed into fish, birds, monkeys and finally men; but some do not try to be good, and remain reptiles still. When those who eat men compare themselves with those who do not, how ashamed they must be. Probably much more ashamed than the reptiles before the monkeys.

"In ancient times Yi Ya boiled his son for Chieh and Chou to eat; that is the old story.* But actually since the creation of heaven and earth by Pan Ku men have been eating each other, from the time of Yi Ya's son to the time of Hsu Hsi-lin,** and from the

* According to ancient records, Yi Ya cooked his son and presented him to Duke Huan of Chi who reigned from 685 to 643 B.C. Chieh and Chou were tyrants of an earlier age. The madman has made a mistake here.

** A revolutionary at the end of the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911), Hsu Hsi-lin was executed in 1907 for assassinating a Manchu official. His heart and liver were eaten.

time of Hsu Hsi-lin down to the man caught in Wolf Cub Village. Last year they executed a criminal in the city, and a consumptive soaked a piece of bread in his blood and sucked it.*

"They want to eat me, and of course you can do nothing about it single-handed; but why should you join them? As man-eaters they are capable of anything. If they eat me, they can eat you as well; members of the same group can still eat each other. But if you will just change your ways immediately, then everyone will have peace. Although this has been going on since time immemorial, today we could make a special effort to be good, and say this can't be done! I'm sure you can say so, brother. The other day when the tenant wanted the rent reduced, you said it couldn't be done."

At first he only smiled cynically, then a murderous gleam came into his eyes, and when I spoke of their secret his face turned pale. Outside the gate stood a group of people, including Mr. Chao and his dog, all craning their necks to peer in. I could not see all their faces, for they seemed to be masked in cloths; some of them looked pale and ghastly still, concealing their laughter. I knew they were one band, all eaters of human flesh. But I also knew that they did not all think alike by any means. Some of them thought that since it had always been so, men should be eaten. Some of them knew that they should not eat men, but still wanted to; and they were afraid people might discover their secret; thus when they heard me they became angry, but they still smiled their cynical, tight-lipped smile.

* It was believed that human blood cured consumption. Thus after the execution of a criminal, the executioner would sell steamed bread dipped in blood.

Suddenly my brother looked furious, and shouted in a loud voice:

"Get out of here, all of you! What is the point of looking at a madman?"

Then I realized part of their cunning. They would never be willing to change their stand, and their plans were all laid; they had stigmatized me as a madman. In future when I was eaten, not only would there be no trouble, but people would probably be grateful to them. When our tenant spoke of the villagers eating a bad character, it was exactly the same device. This is their old trick.

Old Chen came in too, in a great temper, but they could not stop my mouth, I had to speak to those people:

"You should change, change from the bottom of your hearts!" I said. "You must know that in future there will be no place for man-eaters in the world.

"If you don't change, you may all be eaten by each other. Although so many are born, they will be wiped out by the real men, just like wolves killed by the hunters. Just like reptiles!"

Old Chen drove everybody away. My brother had disappeared. Old Chen advised me to go back to my room. The room was pitch dark. The beams and rafters shook above my head. After shaking for some time they grew larger. They piled on top of me.

The weight was so great, I could not move. They meant that I should die. I knew that the weight was false, so I struggled out, covered in perspiration. But I had to say:

"You should change at once, change from the bottom of your hearts! You must know that in future there will be no place for man-eaters in the world. . . ."

The sun does not shine, the door is not opened, every day two meals.

I took up my chopsticks, then thought of my elder brother; I know now how my little sister died: it was all through him. My sister was only five at the time. I can still remember how lovable and pathetic she looked. Mother cried and cried; but he begged her not to cry, probably because he had eaten her himself, and so crying made him feel ashamed. If he had any sense of shame. . . .

My sister was eaten by my brother, but I don't know whether mother realized it or not.

I think mother must have known, but when she was crying she did not say so outright, probably because she thought it proper too. I remember when I was four or five years old, sitting in the cool of the hall, my brother told me that if a man's parents were ill he should cut off a piece of his flesh and boil it for them, if he wanted to be considered a good son; and mother did not contradict him. If one piece could be eaten, obviously so could the whole. And yet just to think of the mourning then still makes my heart bleed; that is the extraordinary thing about it!

I can't bear to think of it.

I have only just realized that I have been living all these years in a place where for four thousand years they have been eating human flesh. My brother had just taken over the charge of the house when our sister died, and he may well have used her flesh in our rice and dishes, making us eat it unwittingly.

It is possible that I ate several pieces of my sister's flesh unwittingly, and now it is my turn. . . .

How can a man like myself, after four thousand years of man-eating history — even though I knew

nothing about it at first — ever hope to face real men?

Perhaps there are still children who have not eaten men?

Save the children. . . .

April 1918

KUNG I-CHI

The wine shops in Luchen are not like those in other parts of China. They all have a right-angled counter facing the street, where hot water is kept ready for warming wine. When men come off work at midday and in the evening they buy a bowl of wine; it cost four coppers twenty years ago, but now it costs ten. Standing beside the counter, they drink it warm, and relax. Another copper will buy a plate of salted bamboo shoots or peas flavoured with aniseed, to go with the wine; while for a dozen coppers you can buy a meat dish. But most of these customers belong to the short-coated class, few of whom can afford this. Only those in long gowns enter the adjacent room to order wine and dishes, and sit and drink at leisure.

At the age of twelve I started work as a waiter in Prosperity Tavern, at the entrance to the town. The tavern keeper said I looked too foolish to serve the long-gowned customers, so I was given work in the outer room. Although the short-coated customers there were more easily pleased, there were quite a few trouble-makers among them too. They would insist on watching with their own eyes as the yellow wine was ladled from the keg, looking to see if there were any water at the bottom of the wine pot, and inspecting for themselves the immersion of the pot in hot water. Under such keen scrutiny, it was very difficult to dilute the wine. So after a few days my

employer decided I was not suited for this work. Fortunately I had been recommended by someone influential, so he could not dismiss me, and I was transferred to the dull work of warming wine.

Thenceforward I stood all day behind the counter, fully engaged with my duties. Although I gave satisfaction at this work, I found it monotonous and futile. Our employer was a fierce-looking individual, and the customers were a morose lot, so that it was impossible to be gay. Only when Kung I-chi came to the tavern could I laugh a little. That is why I still remember him.

Kung was the only long-gowned customer to drink his wine standing. He was a big man, strangely pallid, and scars often showed among the wrinkles of his face. He had a large, unkempt beard, streaked with white. Although he wore a long gown, it was dirty and tattered, and looked as if it had not been washed or mended for over ten years. He used so many archaisms in his speech, it was impossible to understand half he said. As his surname was Kung, he was nicknamed "Kung I-chi," the first three characters in a children's copy-book. Whenever he came into the shop, everyone would look at him and chuckle. And someone would call out:

"Kung I-chi! There are some fresh scars on your face!"

Ignoring this remark, Kung would come to the counter to order two bowls of heated wine and a dish of peas flavoured with aniseed. And he would produce nine coppers. Someone else would then call out, in deliberately loud tones:

"You must have been stealing again!"

"Why spoil a man's good name groundlessly?" he would ask, opening his eyes wide.

"Pooh, good name indeed! Day before yesterday I saw you with my own eyes being hung up and beaten for stealing books from the Ho family!"

Then Kung would flush, the veins on his forehead standing out, as he remonstrated: "Taking a book can't be considered stealing. . . . Taking a book, the affair of a scholar, can't be considered stealing!" Then followed quotations from the classics, like "A gentleman keeps his integrity even in poverty,"* and a jumble of archaic expressions till everybody was roaring with laughter and the whole tavern was gay.

From gossip I heard, Kung I-chi had studied the classics but had never passed the official examinations. With no way of making a living, he grew poorer and poorer, until he was practically reduced to beggary. Happily, he was a good calligrapher, and could get enough copying work to support himself. Unfortunately he had failings: he liked drinking and was lazy. So after a few days he would invariably disappear, taking books, paper, brushes and inkstone with him. And after this had happened several times, nobody wanted to employ him as a copyist again. Then there was no help for him but to take to occasional pilfering. In our tavern his behaviour was exemplary. He never failed to pay up, although sometimes, when he had no ready money, his name would appear on the board where we listed debtors. However, in less than a month he would always settle, and his name would be wiped off the board again.

After drinking half a bowl of wine, Kung would regain his composure. But then someone would ask:

"Kung I-chi, do you really know how to read?"

When Kung looked as if such a question were beneath contempt, they would continue: "How is it

* From *The Analects of Confucius*.

you never passed even the lowest official examination?"

At that Kung would look disconsolate and ill at ease. His face would turn pale and his lips move, but only to utter those unintelligible classical expressions. Then everybody would laugh heartily again, and the whole tavern would be merry.

At such times, I could join in the laughter without being scolded by my master. In fact he often put such questions to Kung himself, to evoke laughter. Knowing it was no use talking to them, Kung would chat to us children. Once he asked me:

"Have you had any schooling?"

When I nodded, he said, "Well then, I'll test you. How do you write the character *hui* in *hui-hsiang* (aniseed — *Translator*) peas?"

I thought, "I'm not going to be tested by a beggar!" So I turned away and ignored him. After waiting for some time, he said very earnestly:

"You can't write it? I'll show you how. Mind you remember! You ought to remember such characters, because later when you have a shop of your own, you'll need them to make up your accounts."

It seemed to me I was still very far from owning a shop; besides, our employer never entered *hui-hsiang* peas in the account book. Amused yet exasperated, I answered listlessly: "Who wants you as a teacher? Isn't it the character *hui* with the grass radical?"

Kung was delighted, and tapped two long fingernails on the counter. "Right, right!" he said, nodding. "Only there are four different ways of writing *hui*. Do you know them?" My patience exhausted, I scowled and made off. Kung I-chi had dipped his finger in wine, in order to trace the characters on the counter; but when he saw how indifferent I was, he sighed and looked most disappointed.

Sometimes children in the neighbourhood, hearing laughter, came to join the fun, and surrounded Kung I-chi. Then he would give them peas flavoured with aniseed, one apiece. After eating the peas, the children would still hang round, their eyes on the dish. Flustered, he would cover the dish with his hand and, bending forward from the waist, would say: "There isn't much. I haven't much as it is." Then straightening up to look at the peas again, he would shake his head. "Not much! Verily, not much, forsooth!" Then the children would scamper off, with shouts of laughter.

Kung I-chi was very good company, but without him we got along all right too.

One day, a few days before the Mid-Autumn Festival, the tavern keeper was laboriously making out his accounts. Taking down the board from the wall, he suddenly said: "Kung I-chi hasn't been in for a long time. He still owes nineteen coppers!" That made me realize how long it was since we had seen him.

"How could he come?" one of the customers said. "His legs were broken in that last beating."

"Ah!"

"He was stealing again. This time he was fool enough to steal from Mr. Ting, the provincial scholar! As if anybody could get away with that!"

"What then?"

"What then? First he had to write a confession, then he was beaten. The beating lasted nearly all night, until his legs were broken."

"And then?"

"Well, his legs were broken."

"Yes, but after that?"

"After? . . . Who knows? He may be dead."

The tavern keeper did not pursue his questions, but went on slowly making up his accounts.

After the Mid-Autumn Festival the wind grew colder every day, as winter came on. Even though I spent all my time by the stove, I had to wear my padded jacket. One afternoon, when the shop was empty, I was sitting with my eyes closed when I heard a voice:

"Warm a bowl of wine."

The voice was very low, yet familiar. But when I looked up, there was no one there. I stood up and looked towards the door, and there, beneath the counter, Kung I-chi was sitting, facing the threshold. His face was haggard and lean, and he looked in a terrible condition. He had on a ragged lined jacket, and was sitting cross-legged on a mat which was attached to his shoulders by a straw rope. When he saw me, he repeated:

"Warm a bowl of wine."

At this point my employer leaned over the counter, and said: "Is that Kung I-chi? You still owe nineteen coppers!"

"That . . . I'll settle next time," replied Kung, looking up disconsolately. "Here's ready money; the wine must be good."

The tavern keeper, just as in the past, chuckled and said:

"Kung I-chi, you've been stealing again!"

But instead of protesting vigorously, the other simply said:

"You like your joke."

"Joke? If you didn't steal, why did they break your legs?"

"I fell," said Kung in a low voice. "I broke them in a fall." His eyes pleaded with the tavern keeper to let the matter drop. By now several people had

gathered round, and they all laughed. I warmed the wine, carried it over, and set it on the threshold. He produced four coppers from his ragged coat pocket, and placed them in my hand. As he did so I saw that his hands were covered with mud—he must have crawled here on them. Presently he finished the wine and, amid the laughter and comments of the others, slowly dragged himself off by his hands.

A long time went by after that without our seeing Kung again. At the end of the year, when the tavern keeper took down the board, he said, "Kung I-chi still owes nineteen coppers!" At the Dragon Boat Festival the next year, he said the same thing again. But when the Mid-Autumn Festival came, he did not mention it. And another New Year came round without our seeing any more of him.

Nor have I ever seen him since—probably Kung I-chi is really dead.

March 1919

MEDICINE

I

It was autumn, in the small hours of the morning. The moon had gone down, but the sun had not yet risen, and the sky appeared a sheet of darkling blue. Apart from night-prowlers, all was asleep. Old Chuan suddenly sat up in bed. He struck a match and lit the grease-covered oil-lamp, which shed a ghostly light over the two rooms of the tea-house.

"Are you going, now, dad?" queried an old woman's voice. And from the small inner room a fit of coughing was heard.

"H'm."

Old Chuan listened as he fastened his clothes, then stretching out his hand said, "Let's have it."

After some fumbling under the pillow his wife produced a packet of silver dollars which she handed over. Old Chuan pocketed it nervously, patted his pocket twice, then lighting a paper lantern and blowing out the lamp went into the inner room. A rustling was heard, and then more coughing. When all was quiet again, Old Chuan called softly: "Son! . . . Don't you get up! . . . Your mother will see to the shop."

Receiving no answer, Old Chuan assumed his son must be sound asleep again; so he went out into the street. In the darkness nothing could be seen but the grey roadway. The lantern light fell on his pacing

feet. Here and there he came across dogs, but none of them barked. It was much colder than indoors, yet Old Chuan's spirits rose, as if he had grown suddenly younger and possessed some miraculous life-giving power. He had lengthened his stride. And the road became increasingly clear, the sky increasingly bright.

Absorbed in his walking, Old Chuan was startled when he saw the cross-road lying distinctly ahead of him. He walked back a few steps to stand under the eaves of a shop, in front of its closed door. After some time he began to feel chilly.

"Uh, an old chap."

"Seems rather cheerful. . . ."

Old Chuan started again and, opening his eyes, saw several men passing. One of them even turned back to look at him, and although he could not see him clearly, the man's eyes shone with a lustful light, like a famished person's at the sight of food. Looking at his lantern, Old Chuan saw it had gone out. He patted his pocket—the hard packet was still there. Then he looked round and saw many strange people, in twos and threes, wandering about like lost souls. However, when he gazed steadily at them, he could not see anything else strange about them.

Presently he saw some soldiers strolling around. The large white circles on their uniforms, both in front and behind, were clear even at a distance; and as they drew nearer, the dark red border could be seen too. The next second, with a trampling of feet, a crowd rushed past. Thereupon the small groups which had arrived earlier suddenly converged and surged forward. Just before the cross-road, they came to a sudden stop and grouped themselves in a semi-circle.

Old Chuan looked in that direction too, but could only see people's backs. Craning their necks as far as they would go, they looked like so many ducks, held and lifted by some invisible hand. For a moment all was still; then a sound was heard, and a stir swept through the onlookers. There was a rumble as they pushed back, sweeping past Old Chuan and nearly knocking him down.

"Hey! Give me the cash, and I'll give you the goods!" A man clad entirely in black stood before him, his eyes like daggers, making Old Chuan shrink to half his normal size. This man was thrusting one huge extended hand towards him, while in the other he held a roll of steamed bread, from which crimson drops were dripping to the ground.

Hurriedly Old Chuan fumbled for his dollars, and trembling he was about to hand them over, but he dared not take the object. The other grew impatient, and shouted: "What are you afraid of? Why not take it?" When Old Chuan still hesitated, the man in black snatched his lantern and tore off its paper shade to wrap up the roll. This package he thrust into Old Chuan's hand, at the same time seizing the silver and giving it a cursory feel. Then he turned away, muttering, "Old fool. . . ."

"Whose sickness is this for?" Old Chuan seemed to hear someone ask; but he made no reply. His whole mind was on the package, which he carried as carefully as if it were the sole heir to an ancient house. Nothing else mattered now. He was about to transplant this new life to his own home, and reap much happiness. The sun too had risen, lighting up the broad highway before him, which led straight home, and the worn tablet behind him at the cross-

road with its faded gold inscription: "Ancient Pavilion."

II

When Old Chuan reached home, the shop had been cleaned, and the rows of tea-tables were shining brightly; but no customers had arrived. Only his son was sitting at a table by the wall, eating. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, his lined jacket was sticking to his spine, and his shoulder blades stuck out so sharply, an inverted V seemed stamped there. At this sight, Old Chuan's brow, which had been clear, contracted again. His wife hurried in from the kitchen, with expectant eyes and a tremor to her lips.

"Get it?"

"Yes."

They went together into the kitchen, and conferred for a time. Then the old woman went out, to return shortly with a dried lotus leaf which she spread on the table. Old Chuan unwrapped the crimson-stained roll from the lantern paper and transferred it to the lotus leaf. Little Chuan had finished his meal, but his mother exclaimed hastily:

"Sit still, Little Chuan! Don't come over here."

Mending the fire in the stove, Old Chuan put the green package and the red and white lantern paper into the stove together. A red-black flame flared up, and a strange odour permeated the shop.

"Smells good! What are you eating?" The hunchback had arrived. He was one of those who spend all their time in tea-shops, the first to come in the morning and the last to leave. Now he had just stumbled

to a corner table facing the street, and sat down. But no one answered his question.

"Puffed rice gruel?"

Still no reply. Old Chuan hurried out to brew tea for him.

"Come here, Little Chuan!" His mother called him into the inner room, set a stool in the middle, and sat the child down. Then, bringing him a round black object on a plate, she said gently:

"Eat it up . . . then you'll be better."

Little Chuan picked up the black object and looked at it. He had the oddest feeling, as if he were holding his own life in his hands. Presently he split it carefully open. From within the charred crust a jet of white vapour escaped, then scattered, leaving only two halves of a white flour steamed roll. Soon it was all eaten, the flavour completely forgotten, only the empty plate left. His father and mother were standing one on each side of him, their eyes apparently pouring something into him and at the same time extracting something. His small heart began to beat faster, and, putting his hands to his chest, he began to cough again.

"Have a sleep; then you'll be all right," said his mother.

Obediently, Little Chuan coughed himself to sleep. The woman waited till his breathing was regular, then covered him lightly with a much patched quilt.

III

The shop was crowded, and Old Chuan was busy, carrying a big copper kettle to make tea for one customer after another. But there were dark circles under his eyes.

"Aren't you well, Old Chuan? . . . What's wrong with you?" asked one greybeard.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? . . . No, I suppose from your smile, there couldn't be. . . ." The old man corrected himself.

"It's just that Old Chuan's busy," said the hunchback. "If his son. . . ." But before he could finish, a heavy-jowled man burst in. He had over his shoulders a dark brown shirt, unbuttoned and fastened carelessly by a broad dark brown girdle at his waist. As soon as he entered, he shouted to Old Chuan:

"Has he taken it? Any better? Luck's with you, Old Chuan. What luck! If not for my hearing of things so quickly. . . ."

Holding the kettle in one hand, the other straight by his side in an attitude of respect, Old Chuan listened with a smile. In fact, all present were listening respectfully. The old woman, dark circles under her eyes too, came out smiling with a bowl containing tea-leaves and an added olive, over which Old Chuan poured boiling water for the newcomer.

"This is a guaranteed cure! Not like other things!" declared the heavy-jowled man. "Just think, brought back warm, and eaten warm!"

"Yes indeed, we couldn't have managed it without Uncle Kang's help." The old woman thanked him very warmly.

"A guaranteed cure!, Eaten warm like this. A roll dipped in human blood like this can cure any consumption!"

The old woman seemed a little disconcerted by the word "consumption," and turned a shade paler; however, she forced a smile again at once and found some pretext to leave. Meanwhile the man in brown was indiscreet enough to go on talking at the top of his

voice until the child in the inner room was woken and started coughing.

"So you've had such a stroke of luck for your Little Chuan! Of course his sickness will be cured completely. No wonder Old Chuan keeps smiling." As he spoke, the greybeard walked up to the man in brown, and lowered his voice to ask:

"Mr. Kang, I heard the criminal executed today came from the Hsia family. Who was it? And why was he executed?"

"Who? Son of Widow Hsia, of course! Young rascal!"

Seeing how they were all hanging on his words, Mr. Kang's spirits rose even higher. His jowls quivered, and he made his voice as loud as he could.

"The rogue didn't want to live, simply didn't want to! There was nothing in it for me this time. Even the clothes stripped from him were taken by Red-eye, the jailer. Our Old Chuan was luckiest, and after him Third Uncle Hsia. He pocketed the whole reward—twenty-five taels of bright silver—and didn't have to spend a cent!"

Little Chuan walked slowly out of the inner room, his hands to his chest, coughing repeatedly. He went to the kitchen, filled a bowl with cold rice, added hot water to it, and sitting down started to eat. His mother, hovering over him, asked softly:

"Do you feel better, son? Still as hungry as ever?"

"A guaranteed cure!" Kang glanced at the child, then turned back to address the company. "Third Uncle Hsia is really smart. If he hadn't informed, even *his* family would have been executed, and their property confiscated. But instead? Silver! That young rogue was a real scoundrel! He even tried to incite the jailer to revolt!"

"No! The idea of it!" A man in his twenties, sitting in the back row, expressed indignation.

"You know, Red-eye went to sound him out, but he started chatting with him. He said the great Manchu empire belongs to us. Just think: is that kind of talk rational? Red-eye knew he had only an old mother at home, but had never imagined he was so poor. He couldn't squeeze anything out of him; he was already good and angry, and then the young fool would 'scratch the tiger's head,' so he gave him a couple of slaps."

"Red-eye is a good boxer. Those slaps must have hurt!" The hunchback in the corner by the wall exulted.

"The rotter was not afraid of being beaten. He even said how sorry he was."

"Nothing to be sorry about in beating a wretch like that," said Greybeard.

Kang looked at him superciliously and said disdainfully: "You misunderstood. The way he said it, he was sorry for Red-eye."

His listeners' eyes took on a glazed look, and no one spoke. Little Chuan had finished his rice and was perspiring profusely, his head steaming.

"Sorry for Red-eye — crazy! He must have been crazy!" said Greybeard, as if suddenly he saw light.

"He must have been crazy!" echoed the man in his twenties.

Once more the customers began to show animation, and conversation was resumed. Under cover of the noise, the child was seized by a paroxysm of coughing. Kang went up to him, clapped him on the shoulder, and said:

"A guaranteed cure! Don't cough like that, Little Chuan! A guaranteed cure!"

"Crazy!" agreed the hunchback, nodding his head.

IV

Originally, the land adjacent to the city wall outside the West Gate had been public land. The zigzag path slanting across it, trodden out by passers-by seeking a short cut, had become a natural boundary line. Left of the path, executed criminals or those who had died of neglect in prison were buried. Right of the path were paupers' graves. The serried ranks of grave mounds on both sides looked like the rolls laid out for a rich man's birthday.

The Ching Ming Festival that year was unusually cold. Willows were only beginning to put forth shoots no larger than grains. Shortly after daybreak, Old Chuan's wife brought four dishes and a bowl of rice to set before a new grave in the right section, and wailed before it. When she had burned paper money she sat on the ground in a stupor as if waiting for something; but for what, she herself did not know. A breeze sprang up and stirred her short hair, which was certainly whiter than in the previous year.

Another woman came down the path, grey-haired and in rags. She was carrying an old, round, red-lacquered basket, with a string of paper money hanging from it; and she walked haltingly. When she saw Old Chuan's wife sitting on the ground watching her, she hesitated, and a flush of shame spread over her pale face. However, she summoned up courage to cross over to a grave in the left section, where she set down her basket.

That grave was directly opposite Little Chuan's, separated only by the path. As Old Chuan's wife watched the other woman set out four dishes and a bowl of rice, then stand up to wail and burn paper money, she thought: "It must be her son in that grave too." The older woman took a few aimless

steps and stared vacantly around, then suddenly she began to tremble and stagger backward: she felt giddy.

Fearing sorrow might send her out of her mind, Old Chuan's wife got up and stepped across the path, to say quietly: "Don't grieve, let's go home."

The other nodded, but her eyes were still fixed, and she muttered: "Look! What's that?"

Looking where she pointed, Old Chuan's wife saw that the grave in front had not yet been overgrown with grass. Ugly patches of soil still showed. But when she looked carefully, she was surprised to see at the top of the mound a wreath of red and white flowers.

Both of them suffered from failing eyesight, yet they could see these red and white flowers clearly. There were not many, but they were placed in a circle; and although not very fresh, were neatly set out. Little Chuan's mother looked round and found her own son's grave, like most of the rest, dotted with only a few little, pale flowers shivering in the cold. Suddenly she had a sense of futility and stopped feeling curious about the wreath.

Meantime the old woman had gone up to the grave to look more closely. "They have no roots," she said to herself. "They can't have grown here. Who could have been here? Children don't come here to play, and none of our relatives have ever been. What could have happened?" She puzzled over it, until suddenly her tears began to fall, and she cried aloud:

"Son, they all wronged you, and you do not forget. Is your grief still so great that today you worked this wonder to let me know?"

She looked all around, but could see only a crow perched on a leafless bough. "I know," she continued. "They murdered you. But a day of reckoning will come, Heaven will see to it. Close your eyes in

peace. . . . If you are really here, and can hear me, make that crow fly on to your grave as a sign."

The breeze had long since dropped, and the dry grass stood stiff and straight as copper wires. A faint, tremulous sound vibrated in the air, then faded and died away. All around was deathly still. They stood in the dry grass, looking up at the crow; and the crow, on the rigid bough of the tree, its head drawn in, stood immobile as iron.

Time passed. More people, young and old, came to visit the graves.

Old Chuan's wife felt somehow as if a load had been lifted from her mind and, wanting to leave, she urged the other:

"Let's go."

The old woman sighed, and listlessly picked up the rice and dishes. After a moment's hesitation she started slowly off, still muttering to herself:

"What could it mean?"

They had not gone thirty paces when they heard a loud caw behind them. Startled, they looked round and saw the crow stretch its wings, brace itself to take off, then fly like an arrow towards the far horizon.

April 1919

TOMORROW

"Not a sound — what's wrong with the kid?"

A bowl of yellow wine in his hands, Red-nosed Kung jerked his head towards the next house as he spoke. Blue-skinned Ah-wu set down his own bowl and punched the other hard in the back.

"Bah . . ." he growled thickly. "Going sentimental again!"

Being so out-of-the-way, Luchen was rather old-fashioned. Folk closed their doors and went to bed before the first watch sounded. By midnight there were only two households awake: Prosperity Tavern where a few gluttons guzzled merrily round the bar, and the house next door where Fourth Shan's Wife lived. For, left a widow two years earlier, she had nothing but the cotton-yarn she spun to support herself and her three-year-old boy; this is why she also slept late.

It was a fact that for several days now there had been no sound of spinning. But since there were only two households awake at midnight, Old Kung and the others were naturally the only ones who could notice if there was any sound from Fourth Shan's Wife's house, and the only ones to notice if there was no sound.

After being punched, Old Kung — looking quite at his ease — took a great swig at his wine and piped up a folk tune.

Meanwhile Fourth Shan's Wife was sitting on the edge of her bed, Pao-erh — her treasure — in her arms, while her loom stood silent on the floor. The murky lamplight fell on Pao-erh's face, which showed livid beneath a feverish flush.

"I've drawn lots before the shrine," she was thinking. "I've made a vow to the gods, he's taken the guaranteed cure. If he still doesn't get better, what can I do? I shall have to take him to Dr. Ho Hsiao-hsien. But maybe Pao-erh's only bad at night; when the sun comes out tomorrow his fever may go and he may breathe more easily again. A lot of illnesses are like that."

Fourth Shan's Wife was a simple woman, who did not know what a fearful word "but" is. Thanks to this "but," many bad things turn out well, many good things turn out badly. A summer night is short. Soon after Old Kung and the others stopped singing the sky grew bright in the east; and presently through the cracks in the window filtered the silvery light of dawn.

Waiting for the dawn was not such a simple matter for Fourth Shan's Wife as for other people. The time dragged terribly slowly: each breath Pao-erh took seemed to last at least a year. But now at last it was bright. Clear daylight swallowed up the lamplight. Pao-erh's nostrils quivered as he gasped for breath.

Fourth Shan's Wife smothered a cry, for she knew that this boded ill. But what could she do? she wondered. Her only hope was to take him to Dr. Ho. She might be a simple woman, but she had a will of her own. She stood up, went to the cupboard, and took out her entire savings — thirteen small silver dollars and a hundred and eighty coppers in all. Having put the whole lot in her pocket, she locked the door and carried Pao-erh as fast as she could to Dr. Ho's house.

Early as it was, there were already four patients sitting there. She produced forty silver cents for a registration slip, and Pao-erh was the fifth to be seen. Dr. Ho stretched out two fingers to feel the child's pulses. His nails were a good four inches long, and Fourth Shan's Wife marvelled inwardly, thinking: "Surely my Pao-erh must be fated to live!" She could not help feeling anxious all the same, and could not stop herself asking nervously:

"What's wrong with my Pao-erh, doctor?"

"An obstruction of the digestive tract."

"Is it serious? Will he . . . ?"

"Take these two prescriptions to start with."

"He can't breathe, his nostrils are twitching."

"The element of fire overpowers that of metal. . . ."

Leaving this sentence unfinished, Dr. Ho closed his eyes; and Fourth Shan's Wife did not like to say any more. Opposite the doctor sat a man in his thirties, who had now finished making out the prescription.

"The first is Infant Preserver Pills," he told her, pointing to the characters in one corner of the paper. "You can get those only at the Chia family's Salvation Shop."

Fourth Shan's Wife took the paper, and walked out thinking as she went. She might be a simple woman, but she knew Dr. Ho's house, Salvation Shop and her own home formed a triangle; so of course it would be simpler to buy the medicine first before going back. She hurried as fast as she could to Salvation Shop. The assistant raised his long finger-nails too as

* The ancient Chinese believed that there were five elements: fire, wood, earth, metal and water. Fire could conquer metal. The traditional Chinese doctors also considered that the heart, lungs, liver, spleen and kidney corresponded to the five elements. Here, Dr. Ho is saying that heart trouble had affected the lungs.

he slowly read the prescription, then slowly wrapped up the medicine. With Pao-erh in her arms, Fourth Shan's Wife waited. Suddenly Pao-erh stretched up a little hand and tugged at his loose tuft of hair. He had never done this before, and his mother was terrified.

The sun was fairly high now. With the child in her arms and the package of medicine to carry, the further she walked the heavier she found her load. The child kept struggling too, which made the way seem even longer. She had to sit down on the doorstep of a big house by the roadside to rest for a while; and presently her clothes lay so clammy against her skin that she realized she had been sweating. But Pao-erh seemed fast asleep. When she stood up again to walk slowly on, she still found him too heavy. A voice beside her said:

"Let me take him for you, Fourth Shan's Wife!" It sounded like Blue-skinned Ah-wu.

When she looked up, sure enough it was Ah-wu, who was following her with eyes still heavy from sleep.

Though Fourth Shan's Wife had been longing for an angel to come to her rescue, she had not wanted her champion to be Ah-wu. But there was something of the gallant about Ah-wu, for he absolutely insisted on helping her; and at last, after several refusals, she gave way. As he stretched his arm between her breast and the child, then thrust it down to take over Pao-erh, she felt a wave of heat along her breast. She flushed right up to her ears.

They walked along, two and a half feet apart. Ah-wu made some remarks, most of which were left unanswered by Fourth Shan's Wife. They had not gone far when he gave the child back to her, saying he had arranged yesterday to have a meal at this time with

a friend. Fourth Shan's Wife took Pao-erh back. Luckily it wasn't far now: already she could see Ninth Aunt Wang sitting at the side of the street, calling out to her:

"Fourth Shan's Wife, how's the child? . . . Did you get to see the doctor?"

"We saw him. . . . Ninth Aunt Wang, you're old and you've seen a lot. Will you look him over for me, and say what you think. . . ."

"Um."

"Well . . . ?"

"Ummm. . . ."

When Ninth Aunt Wang had examined Pao-erh, she nodded her head twice, then shook it twice.

By the time Pao-erh had taken his medicine it was after noon. Fourth Shan's Wife watched him closely, and he did seem a good deal quieter. In the afternoon he suddenly opened his eyes and called: "Ma!" Then he closed his eyes again and seemed to be sleeping. He had not slept long before his forehead and the tip of his nose were beaded with sweat, which, when his mother felt it, stuck to her fingers like glue. In a panic she felt his chest, then burst out sobbing.

After quieting down, his breathing had stopped completely. After sobbing, she started wailing. Soon groups of people gathered: inside the room Ninth Aunt Wang, Blue-skinned Ah-wu and the like; outside others like the landlord of Prosperity Tavern and Red-nosed Kung. Ninth Aunt Wang decreed that a string of paper coins should be burnt; then, taking two stools and five articles of clothing as security, she borrowed two dollars for Fourth Shan's Wife to prepare a meal for all those who were helping.

The first problem was the coffin. Fourth Shan's Wife still had a pair of silver ear-rings and a silver hair-pin plated with gold, which she gave to the land-

lord of Prosperity Tavern so that he would go surety for her and buy a coffin half for cash, half on credit. Blue-skinned Ah-wu raised his hand to volunteer to help, but Ninth Aunt Wang would not hear of it. All she would let him do was carry the coffin the next day. "Old bitch!" he cursed, and stood there grumpily pursing his lips. The landlord left, coming back that evening to report that the coffin would have to be specially made, and would not be ready till nearly morning.

By the time the landlord came back the other helpers had finished their meal. And Luchen being rather old-fashioned, they all went home to sleep before the first watch. Only Ah-wu leant on the bar of Prosperity Tavern drinking, while Old Kung croaked a song.

Meanwhile Fourth Shan's Wife was sitting on the edge of the bed crying, Pao-erh lay on the bed, and the loom stood silent on the floor. After a long time, when Fourth Shan's Wife had no more tears to shed, she opened wide her eyes, and looked around in amazement. All this was impossible! "This is only a dream," she thought. "It's all a dream. I shall wake up tomorrow lying snug in bed, with Pao-erh sleeping snugly beside me. Then he'll wake and call: 'Ma!' and jump down like a young tiger to play."

Old Kung had long since stopped singing, and the light had gone out in Prosperity Tavern. Fourth Shan's Wife sat staring, but could not believe all that had happened. A cock crew, the sky grew bright in the east, and through the cracks in the window filtered the silvery light of dawn.

By degrees the silvery light of dawn turned copper, and the sun shone on the roof. Fourth Shan's Wife sat there staring till someone knocked, when she gave a start and ran to open the door. A stranger was

there with something on his back, and behind him stood Ninth Aunt Wang.

Oh, it was the coffin he'd brought!

Not till that afternoon was the lid of the coffin put on, because Fourth Shan's Wife would keep crying, then taking a look, and could not bear to have the lid closed down. Luckily, Ninth Aunt Wang grew tired of waiting, hurried indignantly forward and pulled her aside. Then they hastily closed it up.

Fourth Shan's Wife had really done all she could for her Pao-erh — nothing had been forgotten. The previous day she had burned a string of paper coins, this morning she had burned the forty-nine books of the *Incantation of Great Mercy*,* and before putting him in the coffin she had dressed him in his newest clothes and set by his pillow all the toys he liked best — a little clay figure, two small wooden bowls, two glass bottles. Though Ninth Aunt Wang reckoned carefully on her fingers, even then she could not think of anything they had forgotten.

Since Blue-skinned Ah-wu did not turn up all day, the landlord of Prosperity Tavern hired two porters for Fourth Shan's Wife at 210 large coppers each, who carried the coffin to the public graveyard and dug a grave. Ninth Aunt Wang helped her prepare a meal to which everyone who had lifted a finger or opened his mouth was invited. Soon the sun made it clear that it was about to set, and the guests unwittingly made it clear that they were about to leave — home they all went.

Fourth Shan's Wife felt dizzy at first, but after a little rest she quietened down. At once, though, she had the impression that things were rather strange.

* This was a Buddhist chant, believed to help the soul of the deceased to reach heaven.

Something which had never happened to her before, and which she had thought never could happen, *had* happened. The more she thought, the more surprised she felt, and another thing that struck her as rather strange was the fact that the room had suddenly grown too silent.

She stood up and lit the lamp, and the room seemed even more silent. She groped her way over to close the door, came back and sat on the bed, while the loom stood silent on the floor. She pulled herself together and looked around, feeling unable either to sit or stand. The room was not only too silent, it was far too big as well, and the things in it were far too empty. This over-large room hemmed her in, and the emptiness all around her bore hard on her, till she could hardly breathe.

She knew now her Pao-erh was really dead; and, not wanting to see this room, she blew out the light and lay down to cry and think. She remembered how Pao-erh had sat by her side when she spun, eating peas flavoured with aniseed. He had watched her hard with his small black eyes and thought. "Ma!" he suddenly said. "Dad sold *hun tun*.* When I'm big I'll sell *hun tun* too, and make lots and lots of money—and I'll give it all to you."

At such times even every inch of yarn she spun seemed worthwhile and alive. But what now? Fourth Shan's Wife had not considered the present at all—as I have said, she was only a simple woman. What solution could she think of? All she knew was that this room was too silent, too large, too empty.

But even though Fourth Shan's Wife was a simple woman, she knew the dead cannot come to life again, and she would never see her Pao-erh any more. She

* Dumplings stuffed with meat and boiled in soup.

sighed and said: "Pao-erh, you must still be here. Let me see you in my dreams." Then she closed her eyes, hoping to fall asleep at once, so that she could see Pao-erh. She heard her hard breathing clearly through the silence, the vastness and emptiness.

At last Fourth Shan's Wife dozed off, and the whole room was very still. Red-nosed Kung's folk song had long since ended, and he had staggered out of Prosperity Tavern to sing in a falsetto:

"I pity you — my darling — all alone. . . ."

Blue-skinned Ah-wu grabbed Old Kung's shoulder, and laughing tipsily they reeled away together.

Fourth Shan's Wife was asleep, Old Kung and the others had gone, the door of Prosperity Tavern was closed. Luchen was sunk in utter silence. Only the night, eager to change into the morrow, was journeying on in the silence; and, hidden in the darkness, a few dogs were barking.

June 1920

AN INCIDENT

Six years have slipped by since I came from the country to the capital. During that time I have seen and heard quite enough of so-called affairs of state; but none of them made much impression on me. If asked to define their influence, I can only say they aggravated my ill temper and made me, frankly speaking, more and more misanthropic.

One incident, however, struck me as significant, and aroused me from my ill temper, so that even now I cannot forget it.

It happened during the winter of 1917. A bitter north wind was blowing, but, to make a living, I had to be up and out early. I met scarcely a soul on the road, and had great difficulty in hiring a rickshaw to take me to S — Gate. Presently the wind dropped a little. By now the loose dust had all been blown away, leaving the roadway clean, and the rickshaw man quickened his pace. We were just approaching S — Gate when someone crossing the road was entangled in our rickshaw and fell slowly.

It was a woman, with streaks of white in her hair, wearing ragged clothes. She had left the pavement without warning to cut across in front of us, and although the rickshaw man had made way, her tattered jacket, unbuttoned and fluttering in the wind, had caught on the shaft. Luckily the rickshaw man was already pulling up, otherwise she would certainly have had a bad fall and been seriously injured.

She lay there on the ground, and the rickshaw man stopped. I did not think the old woman was hurt, and there had been no witnesses to what had happened, so I resented this officiousness which might land him in trouble and hold me up.

"It's all right," I said. "Go on."

He paid no attention, however—perhaps he had not heard—for he set down the shafts, and gently helped the old woman up. Supporting her by one arm, he asked:

"Are you all right?"

"I'm hurt."

I had seen how slowly she fell, and was sure she could not be hurt. She must be pretending, which was disgusting. The rickshaw man had asked for trouble, and now he had got it. He would have to find his own way out.

But the rickshaw man did not hesitate for a minute after the old woman said she was injured. Still holding her arm, he helped her slowly forward. I was surprised. When I looked ahead, I saw a police station. Because of the high wind, there was no one outside, so the rickshaw man helped the old woman towards the gate.

Suddenly I had a strange feeling. His dusty, retreating figure seemed larger at that instant. Indeed, the further he walked the larger he loomed, until I had to look up to him. At the same time he seemed gradually to be exerting a pressure on me, which threatened to overpower the small self under my fur-lined gown.

My vitality seemed sapped as I sat there motionless, my mind a blank, until a policeman came out. Then I got down from the rickshaw.

The policeman came up to me, and said, "Get another rickshaw. He can't pull you any more."

Without thinking, I pulled a handful of coppers from my coat pocket and handed them to the policeman. "Please give him these," I said.

The wind had dropped completely, but the road was still quiet. I walked along thinking, but I was almost afraid to turn my thoughts on myself. Setting aside what had happened earlier, what had I meant by that handful of coppers? Was it a reward? Who was I to judge the rickshaw man? I could not answer myself.

Even now, this remains fresh in my memory. It often causes me distress, and makes me try to think about myself. The military and political affairs of those years I have forgotten as completely as the classics I read in my childhood. Yet this incident keeps coming back to me, often more vivid than in actual life, teaching me shame, urging me to reform, and giving me fresh courage and hope.

July 1920

STORM IN A TEACUP

The sun's bright yellow rays had been gradually fading on the mud flat by the river. The leaves of the tallow trees beside the river were at last able to draw a parched breath, while a few striped mosquitoes danced, humming, beneath them. Less smoke was coming from the kitchen chimneys of the peasants' houses along the river, as women and children sprinkled water on the ground before their doors and brought out little tables and stools. You could tell it was time for the evening meal.

The old folk and the men sat on the low stools, fanning themselves with plantain-leaf fans as they chatted. The children raced about or squatted under the tallow trees playing games with pebbles. The women brought out steaming hot, black dried vegetables and yellow rice. Some scholars, who were passing in a pleasure boat, waxed quite lyrical at the sight. "So free from care!" they exclaimed. "Here's real idyllic happiness."

The scholars were rather wide of the mark, however. And that was because they had not heard what Old Mrs. Ninepounder was saying. Old Mrs. Ninepounder was in a towering temper, whacking the legs of her stool with a tattered plantain fan.

"I've lived to seventy-nine, that's long enough," she declared. "I don't like watching everything going to the dogs—I'd rather die. We're going to have supper

right away, yet they're still eating roast beans, eating us out of house and home!"

Her great-granddaughter, Sixpounder, had just come running toward her holding a handful of beans; but when she sized up the situation she flew straight to the river bank and hid herself behind a tallow tree. Then, sticking out her small head with its twin tufts, she called loudly: "Old Never-dying!"

Though Old Mrs. Ninepounder had lived to a great age, she was by no means deaf; she did not, however, hear what the child said, and went on muttering to herself, "Yes, indeed! Each generation is worse than the last!"

It was the somewhat unusual custom in this village for mothers to weigh their children when they were born, and then use as a name the number of pounds they weighed. Since Old Mrs. Ninepounder's celebration of her fiftieth birthday, she had gradually become a fault-finder, who was always saying that in her young days the summer had not been so hot nor the beans so tough as now. In brief, there was something radically wrong with the present-day world. Otherwise, why should Sixpounder have weighed three pounds less than her great-grandfather and one pound less than her father, Sevenpounder? This was really irrefutable evidence. So she repeated emphatically: "Yes, indeed! Each generation is worse than the last."

Her granddaughter-in-law, Mrs. Sevenpounder, had just come up to the table with a basket of rice. Planking it down on the table, she said angrily: "There you go again! Sixpounder weighed six pounds five ounces when she was born, didn't she? Your family uses private scales which weigh light, eighteen ounces to the pound. With proper sixteen-ounce scales, Sixpounder ought to have been over seven

pounds. I don't believe grandfather and father really weighed a full nine or eight pounds either. Perhaps they used fourteen-ounce scales in those days. . . ."

"Each generation is worse than the last!"

Before Mrs. Sevenpounder could answer, she saw her husband coming out from the top of the lane, and shifted her attack to shout at him: "Why are you so late back, you slacker! Where have you been all this time? You don't care how long you keep us waiting to start supper!"

Although Sevenpounder lived in the village, he had always wanted to better himself. From his grandfather to himself, not a man in his family for three generations had handled a hoe. Like his father before him he worked on a boat which went every morning from Luchen to town, and came back in the evening. As a result, he knew pretty well all that was going on. He knew, for instance, where the thunder god had struck a centipede spirit dead, or where a virgin had given birth to a demon. Though he had made a name for himself in the village, his family abided by country customs and did not light a lamp for supper in the summer; hence, if he came home late, he would be in for a scolding.

In one hand Sevenpounder held a speckled bamboo pipe, over six feet long, which had an ivory mouthpiece and a pewter bowl. He walked slowly over, hanging his head, and sat on one of the low stools. Sixpounder seized this chance to slip out and sit down beside him. She spoke to him, but he made no answer.

"Each generation is worse than the last!" grumbled Old Mrs. Ninepounder.

Sevenpounder raised his head slowly, and said with a sigh: "The emperor has ascended the throne again."

Mrs. Sevenpounder was struck dumb for a moment. Then, suddenly taking in the news, she exclaimed: "Good! That means the emperor will declare another amnesty, doesn't it?"

"I've no queue," Sevenpounder sighed again.

"Does the emperor insist on queues?"

"He does."

Mrs. Sevenpounder was rather upset. "How do you know?" she demanded hastily.

"Everybody in Prosperity Tavern says so."

At that Mrs. Sevenpounder realized instinctively that things were in a bad way, because Prosperity Tavern was where you could pick up all the news. She looked angrily at Sevenpounder's shaved head, with a feeling of hatred and resentment; then fatalistically filled a bowl with rice and slapped it down before him, saying: "Hurry up and eat! Crying won't grow a queue for you, will it?"

The sun had withdrawn its last rays, and the darkling water was gradually cooling off. There was a clatter of bowls and chopsticks on the mud flat, and sweat stood out on the backs of the people there. Mrs. Sevenpounder had finished three bowls of rice when, happening to look up, she saw something that set her heart pounding. Through the tallow leaves, Mr. Chao's short plump figure could be seen approaching from the one-plank bridge. And he was wearing his long sapphire-blue cotton gown. Mr. Chao was the owner of Abundance Tavern in a neighbouring village, and the only notable within a radius of ten miles who was also something of a scholar. His learning gave him a little of the musty air of a departed age. He had a dozen volumes of the *Romance of the Three*

Kingdoms annotated by Chin Sheng-tan,* which he would sit reading and re-reading, character by character. He could tell you not only the names of the five tiger generals,** but even that Huang Chung was also known as Han-sheng, and Ma Chao as Meng-chi. After the Revolution he had coiled his queue on the top of his head like a Taoist priest, and often remarked with a sigh that if Chao Yun were still alive the empire could not have been in such a bad way. Mrs. Sevenpounder's eyesight was good, and she had noticed at once that Mr. Chao was not wearing his hair like a Taoist priest today. He had the front of his head shaved, and had let his queue down. She knew that an emperor must have ascended the throne, that queues must be essential again, and that Sevenpounder must be in great danger too. For Mr. Chao did not wear this long cotton gown for nothing—in fact, during the last three years he had only worn it twice. Once when his enemy Pock-marked Ah-szu fell ill, once when Mr. Lu who had smashed up his wineshop died. This was the third time, and it must mean that something had happened to rejoice his heart and bode ill for his enemies.

Two years ago, Mrs. Sevenpounder remembered, her husband had got drunk and cursed Mr. Chao as a "bastard." Immediately she realized instinctively the danger her husband was in, and her heart started thumping furiously.

The folk sitting at supper stood up when Mr. Chao passed by, and pointed their chopsticks at their rice bowls as they said: "Please join us, Mr. Chao."

* A commentator of literature (1609-1661).

** During the Three Kingdoms period there were five famous generals in the Kingdom of Shu (221-263): Kuan Yu, Chang Fei, Chao Yun, Huang Chung and Ma Chao.

Mr. Chao nodded greetings to all whom he passed, saying, "Go on with your meal, please!" He made straight for Sevenpounder's table. Everybody got up hastily to greet him, and Mr. Chao said with a smile, "Go on with your meal, please!" At the same time he took a good look at the food on the table.

"Those dried vegetables smell good — have you heard the news?" Mr. Chao was standing behind Sevenpounder, opposite Mrs. Sevenpounder.

"The emperor's ascended the throne," said Sevenpounder.

Watching Mr. Chao's expression, Mrs. Sevenpounder forced a smile on to her face. "Now that the emperor's ascended the throne, when will there be a general amnesty?" she asked.

"A general amnesty? — There'll be an amnesty all in good time." Then Mr. Chao's voice grew sterner. "But what about Sevenpounder's queue, eh? That's the important thing. You know how it was in the time of the Long Hairs:* keep your hair and lose your head; keep your head and lose your hair. . . ."

Sevenpounder and his wife had never read any books, so this classical lore was lost on them; but they supposed that since the learned Mr. Chao said this, the situation must be extremely serious, irrevocable in fact. They felt as if they had received their death sentence. There was a buzzing in their ears, and they were unable to utter another word.

"Each generation is worse than the last." Old Mrs. Ninepounder was quite put out again, and seized this chance to speak to Mr. Chao. "The rebels nowadays

* The Taiping army of the peasant revolt (1851-1864). After the establishment of the Ching Dynasty, Chinese men were forced to shave the hair above their foreheads and wear queues. Since the Taipings kept all their hair, they were called Long Hairs.

just cut people's queues off, so that they look neither Buddhist nor Taoist. Were the rebels before like that too? I've lived seventy-nine years, and that's enough. The rebels in the old days wrapped their heads in lengths of red satin that hung all the way down to their heels. The prince wore yellow satin that hung down . . . yellow satin; red satin and yellow satin — I've lived long enough at seventy-nine."

"What's to be done?" muttered Mrs. Sevenpounder, standing up. "We've such a big family, young and old, and all depend on him."

"There's nothing you can do," said Mr. Chao. "The punishment for being without a queue is written down quite distinctly, sentence by sentence in a book. Makes no difference how big your family is."

When Mrs. Sevenpounder heard that it was written down in a book, she really gave up all hope. Beside herself with anxiety, she suddenly hated Sevenpounder. Pointing her chopsticks at the tip of his nose, she cried: "You've made your bed, and now you can lie on it! I said during the revolt, better not go out on the boat, better not go to town! But he would go. He rolled off to town, and they cut his queue off. He used to have a glossy black queue, but now he doesn't look like Buddhist or Taoist. He's made his own bed, he'll have to lie on it. What right has he to drag us into it? Living corpse of a gaol-bird. . . ."

Seeing Mr. Chao had arrived, the villagers finished their meals quickly and gathered round Sevenpounder's table. Sevenpounder knew how unseemly it was for a prominent citizen to be cursed in public like this by his wife. So he raised his head to say slowly:

"You've plenty to say today, but at the time. . . ."

"Living corpse of a gaol-bird!"

Widow Pa Yi had the kindest heart of all the on-lookers there. Carrying her two-year-old baby, born after her husband's death, she was standing next to Mrs. Sevenpounder watching the fun. Now she felt things had gone too far, and hurriedly tried to make peace, saying: "Never mind, Mrs. Sevenpounder. People aren't spirits, how can they foretell the future? Didn't Mrs. Sevenpounder say at the time there was nothing to be ashamed of in having no queue? Besides, the great official in the government office hasn't issued any order yet. . . ."

Before she had finished, Mrs. Sevenpounder's ears were scarlet, and she swept her chopsticks round to point at the widow's nose. "Well, I never!" she protested. "What a thing to say, Mrs. Pa Yi! I'm still a human being, aren't I — how could I have said anything so ridiculous? I cried for three whole days when it happened, everybody saw. Even that imp Sixpounder cried. . . ." Sixpounder had just finished a big bowl of rice, and was holding out her bowl clamouring to have it refilled. Mrs. Sevenpounder was in a temper, and brought her chopsticks down between the twin tufts on the child's head. "Stop that noise! Little slut!"

There was a crack as the empty bowl in Sixpounder's hand fell to the ground. It struck the corner of a brick and a big piece was knocked off. Sevenpounder jumped up to pick up the bowl and examine it as he fitted the pieces together. "Damn you!" he shouted, and gave Sixpounder a slap on the face that knocked her over. Sixpounder lay there crying until Old Mrs. Ninepounder took her by the hand and walked off with her, muttering, "Each generation is worse than the last."

It was Widow Pa Yi's turn to be angry. "Hitting a child, Mrs. Sevenpounder!" she shouted.

Mr. Chao had been looking on with a smile, but when Widow Pa Yi said that the great official in the government office had not issued any order yet, he began to grow angry. Now coming right up to the table, he said: "What does it matter hitting a child? The imperial army will be here any time now. You know, the protector of the empire is General Chang, who's descended from Chang Fei of the period of the Three Kingdoms. He has a huge lance eighteen feet long, and dares take on ten thousand men. Nobody can stand against him." Raising his empty hands, as if grasping a huge invisible lance, he took a few paces toward Widow Pa Yi, saying, "Are you a match for him?"

Widow Pa Yi was trembling with rage as she held her child. But the sudden sight of Mr. Chao bearing down on her with perspiring face and staring eyes gave her the fright of her life. Without finishing what she had to say, she turned and fled. Mr. Chao left too. The villagers blamed Widow Pa Yi for interfering as they made way, and a few men who had cut their queues and started growing them again hid hastily behind the crowd for fear Mr. Chao should see them. However, Mr. Chao passed through the group without making a careful inspection. Suddenly he dived behind the tallow trees, and with a parting "Think you're a match for him!" strode on to the one-plank bridge and was off.

The villagers stood there blankly, turning things over in their minds. They realized they really were no match for Chang Fei; hence Sevenpounder's life was as good as lost. And since Sevenpounder had broken the imperial law, they felt he should never have adopted that lordly air as he smoked that long pipe of his and told them the news in town. So the fact that he was in trouble gave them a certain pleas-

ure. They would have liked to discuss the matter, but did not know what to say. Buzzing mosquitoes brushed past their bare arms, and zoomed back to swarm beneath the tallow trees. Then the villagers scattered to their homes, shut their doors and went to sleep. Grumbling to herself, Mrs. Sevenpounder cleared away the dishes, table and stools and went inside too, to close the door and go to sleep.

Sevenpounder took the broken bowl inside, and sat on the doorsill smoking; but he was still so worried he forgot to pull on the pipe, and the light in the pewter bowl of his six-foot speckled bamboo pipe with the ivory mouthpiece gradually turned black. Matters seemed to have reached a very dangerous state, and he tried to think of a way out or some plan of action. But his thoughts were in a whirl, and he could not straighten them out. "Queues, eh, queues? A huge eighteen-foot lance. Each generation is worse than the last! The emperor's ascended his throne. The broken bowl will have to be taken to town to be riveted. Who's a match for him? It's written in a book. Damn! . . ."

The next morning Sevenpounder went with the boat to town as usual. Toward evening he came back to Luchen, with his six-foot speckled bamboo pipe and the rice bowl. At supper he told Old Mrs. Ninepounder he had had the bowl riveted in town. Because it was such a large break, sixteen copper clamps had been needed, and they cost three cash each—making a total of forty-eight cash altogether.

"Each generation is worse than the last," said Old Mrs. Ninepounder crossly. "I've lived long enough. Three cash for a clamp. These aren't like the clamps we used to have. In the old days . . . ah. . . I've lived seventy-nine years. . . ."

Though Sevenpounder was going into town every day as before, his house seemed to be under a cloud. Most of the villagers kept out of his way, no longer coming to ask him what the news was in town. Mrs. Sevenpounder was always in a bad temper too, and constantly addressed him as "Gaol-bird."

About a fortnight later, when Sevenpounder came back from town, he found his wife in a rare good humour. "Heard anything in town?" she asked him.

"No, nothing."

"Has the emperor ascended his throne?"

"They didn't say."

"Did no one in Prosperity Tavern say anything?"

"No, nothing."

"I don't think the emperor will ascend the throne. I passed Mr. Chao's wineshop today, and he was sitting there reading again, with his queue coiled on the top of his head. He wasn't wearing his long gown either."

" "

"Do you think maybe he won't ascend the throne?"

"I think probably not."

Today Sevenpounder is again respected and well treated by his wife and the villagers. In the summer his family still sit to eat on the mud flat outside their door, and passers-by greet them with smiles. Old Mrs. Ninepounder celebrated her eightieth birthday some time ago, and is as hale and hearty as ever, and as full of complaints. Sixpounder's twin tufts of hair have changed into a thick braid. Although they started binding her feet recently, she can still help Mrs. Sevenpounder with odd jobs, and limps about the mud flat carrying the rice bowl with its sixteen copper rivets.

October 1920

MY OLD HOME

Braving the bitter cold, I travelled more than seven hundred miles back to the old home I had left over twenty years ago.

It was late winter. As we drew near my former home the day became overcast and a cold wind blew into the cabin of our boat, while all one could see through the chinks in our bamboo awning were a few desolate villages, void of any sign of life, scattered far and near under the sombre yellow sky. I could not help feeling depressed.

Ah! Surely this was not the old home I had been remembering for the past twenty years?

The old home I remembered was not in the least like this. My old home was much better. But if you asked me to recall its peculiar charm or describe its beauties, I had no clear impression, no words to describe it. And now it seemed this was all there was to it. Then I rationalized the matter to myself, saying: Home was always like this, and although it has not improved, still it is not so depressing as I imagine; it is only my mood that has changed, because I am coming back to the country this time with no illusions.

This time I had come with the sole object of saying goodbye. The old house our clan had lived in for so many years had already been sold to another family, and was to change hands before the end of the year. I had to hurry there before New Year's Day to say

goodbye for ever to the familiar old house, and to move my family to another place where I was working, far from my old home town.

At dawn on the second day I reached the gateway of my home. Broken stems of withered grass on the roof, trembling in the wind, made very clear the reason why this old house could not avoid changing hands. Several branches of our clan had probably already moved away, so it was unusually quiet. By the time I reached the house my mother was already at the door to welcome me, and my eight-year-old nephew, Hung-erh, rushed out after her.

Though mother was delighted, she was also trying to hide a certain feeling of sadness. She told me to sit down and rest and have some tea, letting the removal wait for the time being. Hung-erh, who had never seen me before, stood watching me at a distance.

But finally we had to talk about the removal. I said that rooms had already been rented elsewhere, and I had bought a little furniture; in addition it would be necessary to sell all the furniture in the house in order to buy more things. Mother agreed, saying that the luggage was nearly all packed, and about half the furniture that could not be easily moved had already been sold. Only it was difficult to get people to pay up.

"You can rest for a day or two, and call on our relatives, and then we can go," said mother.

"Yes."

"Then there is Jun-tu. Each time he comes here he always asks after you, and wants very much to see you again. I told him the probable date of your return home, and he may be coming any time."

At this point a strange picture suddenly flashed into my mind: a golden moon suspended in a deep

blue sky and beneath it the seashore, planted as far as the eye could see with jade-green watermelons, while in their midst a boy of eleven or twelve, wearing a silver necklet and grasping a steel pitchfork in his hand, was thrusting with all his might at a *cha* which dodged the blow and escaped through his legs.

This boy was Jun-tu. When I first met him he was little more than ten — that was thirty years ago, and at that time my father was still alive and the family well off, so I was really a spoilt child. That year it was our family's turn to take charge of a big ancestral sacrifice, which came round only once in thirty years, and hence was an important one. In the first month the ancestral images were presented and offerings made, and since the sacrificial vessels were very fine and there was such a crowd of worshippers, it was necessary to guard against theft. Our family had only one part-time servant. (In our district we divide servants into three classes: those who work all the year for one family are called full-timers; those who are hired by the day are called dailies; and those who farm their own land and only work for one family at New Year, during festivals or when rents are being collected are called part-timers.) And since there was so much to be done, he told my father that he would send for his son Jun-tu to look after the sacrificial vessels.

When my father gave his consent I was overjoyed, because I had long since heard of Jun-tu and knew that he was about my own age, born in the intercalary month,* and when his horoscope was told it was found that of the five elements that of earth

* The Chinese lunar calendar reckons 360 days to a year, and each month comprises 29 or 30 days, never 31. Hence every few years a 13th, or intercalary, month is inserted in the calendar.

was lacking, so his father called him Jun-tu (Inter-calary Earth). He could set traps and catch small birds.

I looked forward every day to New Year, for New Year would bring Jun-tu. At last the end of the year came, and one day mother told me that Jun-tu had come, and I flew to see him. He was standing in the kitchen. He had a round, crimson face and wore a small felt cap on his head and a gleaming silver necklet on his neck, showing that his father doted on him and, fearing he might die, had made a pledge with the gods and buddhas, using the necklet as a talisman. He was very shy, and I was the only person he was not afraid of. When there was no one else there, he would talk with me, so in a few hours we were fast friends.

I don't know what we talked of then, but I remember that Jun-tu was in high spirits, saying that since he had come to town he had seen many new things.

The next day I wanted him to catch birds.

"Can't be done," he said. "It's only possible after a heavy snowfall. On our sands, after it snows, I sweep clear a patch of ground, prop up a big threshing basket with a short stick, and scatter husks of grain beneath; then when I see the birds coming to eat, from a distance I give a tug to the string tied to the stick, and the birds are caught in the basket. There are all kinds: wild pheasants, woodcocks, wood-pigeons, bluebacks. . . ."

Accordingly I looked forward very eagerly to snow.

"Just now it is too cold," said Jun-tu another time, "but you must come to our place in summer. In the daytime we will go to the seashore to look for shells; there are green ones and red ones, besides 'scare-devil' shells and 'buddha's hands.' In the evening

when dad and I go to see to the watermelons, you shall come too."

"Is it to look out for thieves?"

"No. If passers-by are thirsty and pick a watermelon, folk down our way don't consider it as stealing. What we have to look out for are badgers, hedgehogs and *cha*. When you hear a crunching sound under the moonlight, made by the *cha* biting the melons, then you take your pitchfork and creep stealthily over. . . ."

I had no idea then what this thing called *cha* was—and I am not much clearer now, for that matter—but somehow I felt it was something like a small dog, and very fierce.

"Don't they bite people?"

"You have a pitchfork. You go across, and when you see it you strike. It's a very cunning creature and will rush toward you and get away between your legs. Its fur is as slippery as oil. . . ."

I had never known that all these strange things existed: at the seashore were shells all the colours of the rainbow; watermelons had such a dangerous history, yet all I had known of them before was that they were sold in the greengrocer's.

"On our shore, when the tide comes in, there are lots of jumping fish, each with two legs like a frog. . . ."

Jun-tu's mind was a treasure-house of such strange lore, all of it outside the ken of my former friends. They were ignorant of all these things and, while Jun-tu lived by the sea, they like me could see only the four corners of the sky above the high courtyard wall.

Unfortunately, a month after New Year Jun-tu had to go home. I burst into tears and he took refuge in the kitchen, crying and refusing to come out, until

finally he was carried off by his father. Later he sent me by his father a packet of shells and a few very beautiful feathers, and I sent him presents once or twice, but we never saw each other again.

Now that my mother mentioned him, this childhood memory sprang into life like a flash of lightning, and I seemed to see my beautiful old home. So I answered:

"Fine! And he — how is he?"

"He? . . . He's not at all well off either," said mother. And then, looking out of the door: "Here come those people again. They say they want to buy our furniture; but actually they just want to see what they can pick up. I must go and watch them."

Mother stood up and went out. Several women's voices could be heard outside. I called Hung-erh to me and started talking to him, asking him whether he could write, and whether he was glad to be leaving.

"Shall we be going by train?"

"Yes, we shall go by train."

"And boat?"

"We shall take a boat first."

"Oh! Like this! With such a long moustache!" A strange shrill voice suddenly rang out.

I looked up with a start, and saw a woman of about fifty with prominent cheekbones and thin lips standing in front of me, her hands on her hips, not wearing a skirt but with trousered legs apart, just like the compass in a box of geometrical instruments.

I was flabbergasted.

"Don't you know me? And I have held you in my arms!"

I felt even more flabbergasted. Fortunately my mother came in just then and said:

"He has been away so long, you must excuse him for forgetting. You should remember," she said to

me, "this is Mrs. Yang from across the road. . . . She has a beancurd shop."

Then, to be sure, I remembered. When I was a child there was a Mrs. Yang who used to sit nearly all day long in the beancurd shop across the road, and everybody used to call her Beancurd Beauty. But she used to powder herself, and her cheekbones were not so prominent then nor her lips so thin; moreover she remained seated all the time, so that I had never noticed this resemblance to a compass. In those days people said that, thanks to her, that beancurd shop did very good business. But, probably on account of my age, she had made no impression on me, so that later I forgot her entirely. However, the Compass was extremely indignant and looked at me most contemptuously, just as one might look at a Frenchman who had never heard of Napoleon or an American who had never heard of Washington, and smiling sarcastically she said:

"You had forgotten? But naturally I must be beneath your notice. . . ."

"Certainly not . . . I . . ." I answered nervously, getting to my feet.

"Then you listen to me, Master Hsun. You have grown rich, and they are too heavy to move, so you can't possibly want these old pieces of furniture any more. You had better let me take them away. Poor people like us can do with them."

"I haven't grown rich. I must sell these in order to buy. . . ."

"Oh, come now, you have been made the intendant of a circuit, and do you still say you're not rich? You have three concubines now, and whenever you go out it is in a big sedan-chair with eight bearers, and do you still say you're not rich? Hah! You can't hide anything from me."

Knowing there was nothing I could say, I remained silent.

"Come now, really, the more money people have the more miserly they get, and the more miserly they are the more money they get . . ." said the Compass, turning indignantly away and walking slowly off, casually picking up a pair of mother's gloves and stuffing them into her pocket as she went out.

After this a number of relatives in the neighbourhood came to call. In the intervals between entertaining them I did some packing, and so three or four days passed.

One very cold afternoon, I was sitting drinking tea after lunch when I was aware of someone coming in, and turned my head to see who it was. At the first glance I gave an involuntary start, and hastily stood up and went over to welcome him.

The newcomer was Jun-tu. But although I knew at a glance that this was Jun-tu, it was not the Jun-tu I remembered. He had grown to twice his former size. His round face, crimson before, had become sallow and acquired deep lines and wrinkles; his eyes too had become like his father's with rims swollen and red, a feature common to most of the peasants who work by the sea and are exposed all day to the wind from the ocean. He wore a shabby felt cap and just one very thin padded jacket, with the result that he was shivering from head to foot. He was carrying a paper package and a long pipe, nor was his hand the plump red hand I remembered, but coarse and clumsy and chapped, like the bark of a pine tree.

Delighted as I was, I did not know how to express myself, and could only say:

"Oh! Jun-tu — so it's you? . . ."

After this there were so many things I wanted to talk about, they should have poured out like a string of beads: woodcocks, jumping fish, shells, *cha*. . . . But I was tongue-tied, unable to put all I was thinking into words.

He stood there, mixed joy and sadness showing on his face. His lips moved, but not a sound did he utter. Finally, assuming a respectful attitude, he said clearly:

"Master! . . ."

I felt a shiver run through me; for I knew then what a lamentably thick wall had grown up between us. Yet I could not say anything.

He turned his head to call:

"Shui-sheng, bow to the master." Then he pulled forward a boy who had been hiding behind his back, and this was just the Jun-tu of twenty years before, only a little paler and thinner, and he had no silver necklet on his neck.

"This is my fifth," he said. "He has not seen any society, so he is shy and awkward."

Mother came downstairs with Hung-erh, probably after hearing our voices.

"I got the letter some time ago, madam," said Jun-tu. "I was really so pleased to know that the master was coming back. . . ."

"Now, why ever are you so polite? Weren't you playmates together in the past?" said mother gaily. "You had better still call him Brother Hsun as before."

"Oh, you are really too. . . . What bad manners that would be. I was a child then and didn't understand." As he was speaking Jun-tu motioned Shui-sheng to come and bow, but the child was shy, and only stood stock-still behind his father.

"So he is Shui-sheng? Your fifth?" asked mother. "We are all strangers, you can't blame him for feeling shy. Hung-erh had better take him out to play."

When Hung-erh heard this he went over to Shui-sheng, and Shui-sheng went out with him, entirely at his ease. Mother asked Jun-tu to sit down, and after a little hesitation he did so; then leaning his long pipe against the table he handed over the paper package, saying:

"In winter there is nothing worth bringing; but these few beans we dried ourselves there, if you will excuse the liberty, sir."

When I asked him how things were with him, he just shook his head.

"In a very bad way. Even my sixth can do a little work, but still we haven't enough to eat . . . and then there is no security . . . all sorts of people want money, and there is no fixed rule . . . and the harvests are bad. You grow things, and when you take them to sell you always have to pay several taxes and lose money, while if you don't try to sell, the things may go bad. . . ."

He kept shaking his head; yet, although his face was lined with wrinkles, not one of them moved, just as if he were a stone statue. No doubt he felt intensely bitter, but could not express himself. After a pause he took up his pipe and began to smoke in silence.

From her chat with him, mother learned that he was busy at home and had to go back the next day; and since he had had no lunch, she told him to go to the kitchen and fry some rice for himself.

After he had gone out, mother and I both shook our heads over his hard life: many children, famines, taxes, soldiers, bandits, officials and landed gentry, all had squeezed him as dry as a mummy. Mother said

that we should offer him all the things we were not going to take away, letting him choose for himself.

That afternoon he picked out a number of things: two long tables, four chairs, an incense burner and candlesticks, and one balance. He also asked for all the ashes from the stove (in our part we cook over straw, and the ashes can be used to fertilize sandy soil), saying that when we left he would come to take them away by boat.

That night we talked again, but not of anything serious; and the next morning he went away with Shui-sheng.

After another nine days it was time for us to leave. Jun-tu came in the morning. Shui-sheng had not come with him—he had just brought a little girl of five to watch the boat. We were very busy all day, and had no time to talk. We also had quite a number of visitors, some to see us off, some to fetch things, and some to do both. It was nearly evening when we got on the boat, and by that time everything in the house, however old or shabby, large or small, fine or coarse, had been cleared away.

As we set off, the green mountains on either side of the river became deep blue in the dusk, receding toward the stern of the boat.

Hung-erh and I, leaning against the cabin window, were looking out together at the indistinct scene outside, when suddenly he asked:

“Uncle, when shall we go back?”

“Go back? Do you mean that before you’ve left you want to go back?”

“Well, Shui-sheng has invited me to his home...” He opened wide his black eyes in anxious thought.

Mother and I both felt rather sad, and so Jun-tu’s name came up again. Mother said that ever since our family started packing up, Mrs. Yang from the

beancurd shop had come over every day, and the day before in the ash-heap she had unearthed a dozen bowls and plates, which after some discussion she insisted must have been buried there by Jun-tu, so that when he came to remove the ashes he could take them home at the same time. After making this discovery Mrs. Yang was very pleased with herself, and flew off taking the dog-teaser with her. (The dog-teaser is used by poultry keepers in our part. It is a wooden cage inside which food is put, so that hens can stretch their necks in to eat but dogs can only look on furiously.) And it was a marvel, considering the size of her feet, how fast she could run.

I was leaving the old house farther and farther behind, while the hills and rivers of my old home were also receding gradually ever farther in the distance. But I felt no regret. I only felt that all round me was an invisible high wall, cutting me off from my fellows, and this depressed me thoroughly. The vision of that small hero with the silver necklet among the watermelons had formerly been as clear as day, but now it had suddenly blurred, adding to my depression.

Mother and Hung-erh fell asleep.

I lay down, listening to the water rippling beneath the boat, and knew that I was going my way. I thought: although there is such a barrier between Jun-tu and myself, our children still have much in common, for wasn't Hung-erh thinking of Shui-sheng just now? I hope they will not be like us, that they will not allow a barrier to grow up between them. But again I would not like them, because they want to be one, to have a treadmill existence like mine, nor to suffer like Jun-tu until they become stupefied, nor yet, like others, to devote all their energies to

dissipation. They should have a new life, a life we have never experienced.

The access of hope made me suddenly afraid. When Jun-tu had asked for the incense burner and candlesticks I had laughed up my sleeve at him, to think that he was still worshipping idols and would never put them out of his mind. Yet what I now called hope was no more than an idol I had created myself. The only difference was that what he desired was close at hand, while what I desired was less easily realized.

As I dozed, a stretch of jade-green seashore spread itself before my eyes, and above a round golden moon hung from a deep blue sky. I thought: hope cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist. It is just like roads across the earth. For actually the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made.

January 1921

THE TRUE STORY OF AH Q

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I have been meaning to write the true story of Ah Q for several years now. But while wanting to write I had some trepidations, too, which goes to show that I am not one of those who achieve glory by writing; for an immortal pen has always been required to record the deeds of an immortal man, the man becoming known to posterity through the writing and the writing known to posterity through the man — until finally it is not clear who is making whom known. But in the end, as though possessed by some fiend, I always came back to the idea of writing the story of Ah Q.

And yet no sooner had I taken up my pen than I became conscious of huge difficulties in writing this far-from-immortal work. The first was the question of what to call it. Confucius said, "If the name is not correct, the words will not ring true"; and this axiom should be most scrupulously observed. There are many types of biographies: official biographies, autobiographies, unauthorized biographies, legends, supplementary biographies, family histories, sketches . . . but unfortunately none of these suited my purpose. "Official biography?" This account will ob-

viously not be included with those of many eminent people in some authentic history. "Autobiography?" But I am obviously not Ah Q. If I were to call this an "unauthorized biography," then where is his "authenticated biography"? The use of "legend" is impossible, because Ah Q was no legendary figure. "Supplementary biography?" But no president has ever ordered the National Historical Institute to write a "standard life" of Ah Q. It is true that although there are no "lives of gamblers" in authentic English history, the famous author Conan Doyle nevertheless wrote *Rodney Stone*;^{*} but while this is permissible for a famous author it is not permissible for such as I. Then there is "family history"; but I do not know whether I belong to the same family as Ah Q or not, nor have I ever been entrusted with such a task by his children or grandchildren. If I were to use "sketch," it might be objected that Ah Q has no "complete account." In short, this is really a "life," but since I write in vulgar vein using the language of hucksters and pedlars, I dare not presume to give it so high-sounding a title; so from the stock phrase of the novelists, who are not reckoned among the Three Cults and Nine Schools:^{**} "Enough of this digression, and back to the *true story*," I will take the last two words as my title; and if this is reminiscent of the *True Story of Calligraphy*^{***} of the ancients, it cannot be helped.

* In Chinese this novel was called *Supplementary Biographies of the Gamblers*.

** The Three Cults were Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. The Nine Schools included the Confucian, Taoist, Legalist and Moist schools, as well as others. Novelists, who did not belong to any of these, were considered not quite respectable.

*** A book by Feng Wu of the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911).

The second difficulty confronting me was that a biography of this type should start off something like this: "So-and-so, whose other name was so-and-so, was a native of such-and-such a place"; but I don't really know what Ah Q's surname was. Once, he seemed to be named Chao, but the next day there was some confusion about the matter again. This was after Mr. Chao's son had passed the county examination, and his success was being announced in the village, to the sounding of gongs. Ah Q, who had just drunk two bowls of yellow wine, began to prance about declaring that this reflected credit on him too, since he belonged to the same clan as Mr. Chao, and by an exact reckoning was three generations senior to the successful candidate. At the time several of the bystanders even began to stand slightly in awe of him. But the next day the bailiff summoned Ah Q to Mr. Chao's house. When the old gentleman set eyes on him his face turned crimson with fury and he roared:

"Ah Q, you miserable wretch! Did you say I belonged to the same clan as you?"

Ah Q made no reply.

The more he looked at him the angrier Mr. Chao became, and advancing menacingly a few steps he said, "How dare you talk such nonsense! How could I have such a relative as you? Is your surname Chao?"

Ah Q made no reply, and was planning a retreat; but Mr. Chao darted forward and gave him a slap on the face.

"How could *you* be named Chao!—Do you think you are worthy of the name Chao?"

Ah Q made no attempt to defend his right to the name Chao, but rubbing his left cheek went out with the bailiff. Once outside, he had to listen to another

torrent of abuse from the bailiff, and thank him to the tune of two hundred cash. All who heard of this said Ah Q was a great fool to ask for a beating like that. Even if his surname *were* Chao — which wasn't likely — he should have known better than to boast like that when there was a Mr. Chao living in the village. After this no further mention was made of Ah Q's ancestry, so that I still don't know what his surname really was.

The third difficulty I encountered in writing this work was that I don't know how Ah Q's personal name should be written either. During his lifetime everybody called him Ah Quei, but after his death not a soul mentioned Ah Quei again; for he was obviously not one of those whose name is "preserved on bamboo tablets and silk."* If there is any question of preserving his name, this essay must be the first attempt at doing so. Hence I am confronted with this difficulty at the outset. I have given the question careful thought: Ah Quei — would that be the "Quei" meaning cassia or the "Quei" meaning nobility? If his other name had been Moon Pavilion, or if he had celebrated his birthday in the month of the Moon Festival, then it would certainly be the "Quei" for cassia.** But since he had no other name — or if he had, no one knew it — and since he never sent out invitations on his birthday to secure complimentary verses, it would be arbitrary to write Ah Quei (cassia). Again, if he had had an elder or younger brother called Ah Fu (prosperity), then he would certainly be called Ah Quei (nobility). But he was all on his own:

* A phrase first used in the third century B.C. Bamboo and silk were writing material in ancient China.

** The cassia blooms in the month of the Moon Festival. Also, according to Chinese folklore, it is believed that the shadow on the moon is a cassia tree.

thus there is no evidence for writing Ah Quei (nobility). All the other, unusual characters with the sound Quei are even less suitable. I once put this question to Mr. Chao's son, the successful county candidate, but even such a learned man as he was baffled by it. According to him, however, the reason that this name could not be traced was that Chen Tu-hsiu* had brought out the magazine *New Youth*, advocating the use of the Western alphabet, so that the national culture was going to the dogs. As a last resort, I asked someone from my district to go and look up the legal documents recording Ah Q's case, but after eight months he sent me a letter saying that there was no name anything like Ah Quei in those records. Although uncertain whether this was the truth or whether my friend had simply done nothing, after failing to trace the name this way I could think of no other means of finding it. Since I am afraid the new system of phonetics has not yet come into common use, there is nothing for it but to use the Western alphabet, writing the name according to English spelling as Ah Quei and abbreviating it to Ah Q. This approximates to blindly following the *New Youth* magazine, and I am thoroughly ashamed of myself; but since even such a learned man as Mr. Chao's son could not solve my problem, what else can I do?

My fourth difficulty was with Ah Q's place of origin. If his surname were Chao, then according to the old custom which still prevails of classifying people by their districts, one might look up the commentary in

* 1880-1942. A professor of Peking University at this time, he edited *New Youth*, the monthly which led the new cultural movement.

*The Hundred Surnames** and find "A native of Tien-shui in Kansu Province." But unfortunately this surname is open to question, with the result that Ah Q's place of origin must also remain uncertain. Although he lived for the most part in Weichuang, he often stayed in other places, so that it would be wrong to call him a native of Weichuang. It would, in fact, amount to a distortion of history.

The only thing that consoles me is the fact that the character "Ah" is absolutely correct. This is definitely not the result of false analogy, and is well able to stand the test of scholarly criticism. As for the other problems, it is not for such unlearned people as myself to solve them, and I can only hope that disciples of Dr. Hu Shih, who has such "a passion for history and antiquities,"** may be able in future to throw new light on them. I am afraid, however, that by that time my *True Story of Ah Q* will have long since passed into oblivion.

The foregoing may be considered as an introduction.

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF AH Q'S VICTORIES

In addition to the uncertainty regarding Ah Q's surname, personal name, and place of origin, there is even some uncertainty regarding his "back-

* A school primer, in which the surnames were written into verse.

** This phrase was often used in self-praise by Hu Shih, the well-known reactionary politician and writer.

ground." This is because the people of Weichuang only made use of his services or treated him as a laughing-stock, without ever paying the slightest attention to his "background." Ah Q himself remained silent on this subject, except that when quarrelling with someone he might glance at him and say, "We used to be much better off than you! Who do you think you are anyway?"

Ah Q had no family but lived in the Tutelary God's Temple at Weichuang. He had no regular work either, simply doing odd jobs for others: if there was wheat to be cut he would cut it, if there was rice to be ground he would grind it, if there was a boat to be punted he would punt it. If the work lasted for a considerable period he might stay in the house of his temporary employer, but as soon as it was finished he would leave. Thus whenever people had work to be done they would remember Ah Q, but what they remembered was his service and not his "background"; and by the time the job was done even Ah Q himself would be forgotten, to say nothing of his "background." Once indeed an old man remarked, "What a good worker Ah Q is!" At that time Ah Q, stripped to the waist, listless and lean, was standing before him, and other people did not know whether the remark was meant seriously or derisively, but Ah Q was overjoyed.

Ah Q, again, had a very high opinion of himself. He looked down on all the inhabitants of Weichuang, thinking even the two young "scholars" not worth a smile, though most young scholars were likely to pass the official examinations. Mr. Chao and Mr. Chien were held in great respect by the villagers, for in addition to being rich they were both the fathers of young scholars. Ah Q alone showed them

no exceptional deference, thinking to himself, "My sons may be much greater!"

Moreover, after Ah Q had been to town several times, he naturally became even more conceited, although at the same time he had the greatest contempt for townspeople. For instance, a bench made of a wooden plank three feet by three inches the Weichuang villagers called a "long bench." Ah Q called it a "long bench" too; but the townspeople called it a "straight bench," and he thought, "This is wrong. How ridiculous!" Again, when they fried large-headed fish in oil the Weichuang villagers all added shallot leaves sliced half an inch long, whereas the townspeople added finely shredded shallots, and he thought, "This is wrong too. How ridiculous!" But the Weichuang villagers were really ignorant rustics who had never seen the fried fish of the town!

Ah Q who "used to be much better off," who was a man of the world and "a good worker," would have been almost the perfect man had it not been for a few unfortunate physical blemishes. The most annoying consisted of some places on his scalp where in the past, at some uncertain date, shiny ringworm scars had appeared. Although these were on his own head, apparently Ah Q did not consider them as altogether honourable, for he refrained from using the word "ringworm" or any words that sounded anything like it. Later he improved on this, making "bright" and "light" forbidden words, while later still even "lamp" and "candle" were taboo. Whenever this taboo was disregarded, whether intentionally or not, Ah Q would fly into a rage, his ringworm scars turning scarlet. He would look over the offender, and if it were someone weak in repartee he would curse him, while if it were a poor fighter he would hit him. And yet, curiously enough, it was usually Ah Q

who was worsted in these encounters, until finally he adopted new tactics, contenting himself in general with a furious glare.

It so happened, however, that after Ah Q had taken to using this furious glare, the idlers in Weichuang grew even more fond of making jokes at his expense. As soon as they saw him they would pretend to give a start, and say:

"Look! It's lighting up."

Ah Q would rise to the bait as usual, and glare furiously.

"So there is a kerosene lamp here," they would continue, not in the least intimidated.

Ah Q could do nothing, but rack his brains for some retort: "You don't even deserve. . . ." At this juncture it seemed as if the scars on his scalp were noble and honourable, not just ordinary ringworm scars. However, as we said above, Ah Q was a man of the world: he knew at once that he had nearly broken the "taboo" and refrained from saying any more.

If the idlers were still not satisfied, but continued to bait him, they would in the end come to blows. Then only after Ah Q had, to all appearances, been defeated, had his brownish pigtail pulled and his head bumped against the wall four or five times, would the idlers walk away, satisfied at having won. Ah Q would stand there for a second, thinking to himself, "It is as if I were beaten by my son. What is the world coming to nowadays. . . ." Thereupon he too would walk away, satisfied at having won.

Whatever Ah Q thought he was sure to tell people later; thus almost all who made fun of Ah Q knew that he had this means of winning a psychological victory. So after this anyone who pulled or twisted his brown pigtail would forestall him by saying: "Ah

Q, this is not a son beating his father, it is a man beating a beast. Let's hear you say it: A man beating a beast!"

Then Ah Q, clutching at the root of his pigtail, his head on one side, would say: "Beating an insect — how about that? I am an insect — now will you let me go?"

But although he was an insect the idlers would not let him go until they had knocked his head five or six times against something nearby, according to their custom, after which they would walk away satisfied that they had won, confident that this time Ah Q was done for. In less than ten seconds, however, Ah Q would walk away also satisfied that he had won, thinking that he was the "foremost self-belittler," and that after subtracting "self-belittler" what remained was "foremost." Was not the highest successful candidate in the official examination also the "foremost"? "And who do you think you are anyway?"

After employing such cunning devices to get even with his enemies, Ah Q would make his way cheerfully to the wineshop to drink a few bowls of wine, joke with the others again, quarrel with them again, come off victorious again, and return cheerfully to the Tutelary God's Temple, there to fall asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. If he had money he would go to gamble. There would be a group of men squatting on the ground, Ah Q sandwiched in the midst, his face streaming with perspiration; and his voice would be the loudest to shout: "Four hundred on the Green Dragon!"

"Hey — open there!" the stakeholder, his face streaming with perspiration too, would open the box and chant: "Heavenly Gate! . . . Nothing for the Corner! . . . No stakes on the Popularity Passage! Pass over Ah Q's coppers!"

"The Passage — one hundred — one hundred and fifty."

To the tune of this chanting, Ah Q's money would gradually vanish into the pockets of other perspiring people. Finally he would be forced to squeeze his way out of the crowd and watch from the back, taking a vicarious interest in the game until it broke up, when he would return reluctantly to the Tutelary God's Temple. And the next day he would go to work with swollen eyes.

However, the truth of the proverb "Misfortune may be a blessing in disguise" was shown when Ah Q was unfortunate enough to win and almost suffered defeat in the end.

This was the evening of the Festival of the Gods in Weichuang. According to custom there was a play; and close to the stage, also according to custom, were numerous gambling tables. The drums and gongs of the play sounded about three miles away to Ah Q who had ears only for the stakeholder's chant. He staked successfully again and again, his coppers turning into silver coins, his silver coins into dollars, and his dollars mounting up. In his excitement he cried out, "Two dollars on Heavenly Gate!"

He never knew who started the fighting, nor for what reason. Curses, blows and footsteps formed a confused medley of sound in his head, and by the time he clambered to his feet the gambling tables had vanished and so had the gamblers. Several parts of his body seemed to be aching as if he had been kicked and knocked about, while a number of people were looking at him in astonishment. Feeling as if there were something amiss, he walked back to the Tutelary God's Temple, and by the time he regained his composure he realized that his pile of dollars had disappeared. Since most of the people

who ran gambling tables at the Festival were not natives of Weichuang, where could he look for the culprits?

So white and glittering a pile of silver! It had all been his . . . but now it had disappeared. Even to consider it tantamount to being robbed by his son could not comfort him. To consider himself as an insect could not comfort him either. This time he really tasted something of the bitterness of defeat.

But presently he changed defeat into victory. Raising his right hand he slapped his own face hard twice, so that it tingled with pain. After this slapping his heart felt lighter, for it seemed as if the one who had given the slap was himself, the one slapped some other self, and soon it was just as if he had beaten someone else—in spite of the fact that his face was still tingling. He lay down satisfied that he had gained the victory.

Soon he was asleep.

CHAPTER 3

A FURTHER ACCOUNT OF AH Q'S VICTORIES

Although Ah Q was always gaining victories, it was only after he was favoured with a slap on the face by Mr. Chao that he became famous.

After paying the bailiff two hundred cash he lay down angrily. Later he said to himself, "What is the world coming to nowadays, with sons beating their parents. . . ." Then the thought of the prestige of Mr. Chao, who was now his son, gradually raised his spirits, and he got up and went to the wineshop sing-

ing *The Young Widow at Her Husband's Grave*. At that time he did feel that Mr. Chao was a cut above most people.

After this incident, strange to relate, it was true that everybody seemed to pay him unusual respect. He probably attributed this to the fact that he was Mr. Chao's father, but actually such was not the case. In Weichuang, as a rule, if the seventh child hit the eighth child or Li So-and-so hit Chang So-and-so, it was not taken seriously. A beating had to be connected with some important personage like Mr. Chao before the villagers thought it worth talking about. But once they thought it worth talking about, since the beater was famous, the one beaten enjoyed some of his reflected fame. As for the fault being Ah Q's, that was naturally taken for granted, the reason being that Mr. Chao could not possibly be wrong. But if Ah Q were wrong, why did everybody seem to treat him with unusual respect? This is difficult to explain. We may put forward the hypothesis that it was because Ah Q had said he belonged to the same family as Mr. Chao; thus, although he had been beaten, people were still afraid there might be some truth in what he said and therefore thought it safer to treat him more respectfully. Or, alternatively, it may have been like the case of the sacrificial beef in the Confucian temple: although the beef was in the same category as the sacrificial pork and mutton, being of animal origin just as they were, later Confucians did not dare touch it since the sage had enjoyed it.

After this Ah Q prospered for several years.

One spring, when he was walking along in a state of happy intoxication, he saw Whiskers Wang sitting stripped to the waist in the sunlight at the foot of a wall, catching lice; and at this sight his own body

began to itch. Since Whiskers Wang was scabby and bewhiskered, everybody called him "Ringworm Whiskers Wang." Although Ah Q omitted the word "Ringworm," he had the greatest contempt for him. Ah Q felt that while scabs were nothing to take exception to, such hairy cheeks were really too outlandish, and could excite nothing but scorn. So Ah Q sat down by his side. If it had been any other idler, Ah Q would never have dared sit down so casually; but what had he to fear by the side of Whiskers Wang? To tell the truth, the fact that he was willing to sit down was an honour for Wang.

Ah Q took off his tattered lined jacket, and turned it inside out; but either because he had washed it recently or because he was too clumsy, a long search yielded only three or four lice. He saw that Whiskers Wang, on the other hand, was catching first one and then another in swift succession, cracking them in his mouth with a popping sound.

Ah Q felt first disappointed and then resentful: the despicable Whiskers Wang could catch so many while he himself had caught so few—what a great loss of face! He longed to catch one or two big ones, but there were none, and it was only with considerable difficulty that he managed to catch a middle-sized one, which he thrust fiercely into his mouth and bit savagely; but it only gave a small sputtering sound, again inferior to the noise Whiskers Wang was making.

All Ah Q's scars turned scarlet. Flinging his jacket on the ground, he spat and said, "Hairy worm!"

"Mangy dog, who are you calling names?" Whiskers Wang looked up contemptuously.

Although the relative respect accorded him in recent years had increased Ah Q's pride, when con-

fronted by loafers who were accustomed to fighting he remained rather timid. On this occasion, however, he was feeling exceptionally pugnacious. How dare a hairy-cheeked creature like this insult him?

"Anyone who the name fits," said Ah Q standing up, his hands on his hips.

"Are your bones itching?" demanded Whiskers Wang, standing up too and putting on his coat.

Thinking that Wang meant to run away, Ah Q stepped forward raising his fist to punch him. But before his fist came down, Whiskers Wang had already seized him and given him a tug which sent him staggering. Then Whiskers Wang seized Ah Q's pigtail and started dragging him towards the wall to knock his head in the time-honoured manner.

"A gentleman uses his tongue but not his hands!" protested Ah Q, his head on one side.

Apparently Whiskers Wang was no gentleman, for without paying the slightest attention to what Ah Q said he knocked his head against the wall five times in succession, and gave him a great shove which sent him staggering two yards away. Only then did Whiskers Wang walk away satisfied.

As far as Ah Q could remember, this was the first humiliation of his life, because he had always scoffed at Whiskers Wang on account of his ugly whiskered cheeks, but had never been scoffed at, much less beaten by him. And now, contrary to all expectations, Whiskers Wang had beaten him. Perhaps what they said in the market-place was really true: "The Emperor has abolished the official examinations, so that scholars who have passed them are no longer in demand." As a result of this the Chao family must have lost prestige. Was it a result of this, too, that people were treating him contemptuously?

Ah Q stood there irresolutely.

From the distance approached another of Ah Q's enemies. This was Mr. Chien's eldest son whom Ah Q also despised. After studying in a foreign school in the city, it seemed he had gone to Japan. When he came home half a year later his legs were straight* and his pigtail had disappeared. His mother cried bitterly a dozen times, and his wife tried three times to jump into the well. Later his mother told everyone, "His pigtail was cut off by some scoundrel when he was drunk. He would have been able to be an official, but now he will have to wait until it has grown again before he thinks of that." Ah Q did not, however, believe this, and insisted on calling him "Imitation Foreign Devil" and "Traitor in Foreign Pay." As soon as he saw him he would start cursing under his breath.

What Ah Q despised and detested most in him was his false pigtail. When it came to having a false pigtail, a man could scarcely be considered as human; and the fact that his wife had not attempted to jump into the well a fourth time showed that she was not a good woman either.

Now this "Imitation Foreign Devil" was approaching.

"Baldhead — Ass —" In the past Ah Q had cursed under his breath only, inaudibly; but today, because he was in a bad temper and wanted to work off his feelings, the words slipped out involuntarily.

Unfortunately this "baldhead" was carrying a shiny, brown stick which Ah Q called a "staff carried by the mourner." With great strides he bore down on Ah Q who, guessing at once that a beating was im-

* When the Chinese of those days saw foreigners walking with big strides—unlike the usual Chinese gait—they imagined that foreigners had no joints at the knees.

pending, hastily braced himself to wait with a stiffened back. Sure enough, there was a resounding thwack which seemed to have alighted on his head.

"I meant him!" explained Ah Q, pointing to a near-by child.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

As far as Ah Q could remember, this was the second humiliation of his life. Fortunately after the thwacking stopped it seemed to him that the matter was closed, and he even felt somewhat relieved. Moreover, the precious "ability to forget" handed down by his ancestors stood him in good stead. He walked slowly away and by the time he was approaching the wineshop door he felt quite happy again.

Just then, however, a small nun from the Convent of Quiet Self-improvement came walking towards him. The sight of a nun always made Ah Q swear; how much more so, then, after his humiliations? When he recalled what had happened, all his anger revived.

"So all my bad luck today was because I had to see you!" he thought to himself.

He went up to her and spat noisily. "Ugh! . . . Pah!"

The small nun paid not the least attention, but walked on with lowered head. Ah Q went up to her and shot out a hand to rub her newly shaved scalp, then laughing stupidly said, "Baldhead! Go back quickly, your monk is waiting for you. . . ."

"Who are you pawing? . . . " demanded the nun, blushing crimson as she began to hurry away.

The men in the wineshop roared with laughter. Seeing that his feat was admired, Ah Q began to feel elated.

"If the monk paws you, why can't I?" said he, pinching her cheek.

Again the men in the wineshop roared with laughter. Ah Q felt even more pleased, and in order to satisfy those who were expressing approval, he pinched her hard again before letting her go.

During this encounter he had already forgotten Whiskers Wang and the Imitation Foreign Devil, as if all the day's bad luck had been avenged. And, strange to relate, even more relaxed than after the beating, he felt light and buoyant as if ready to float into the air.

"Ah Q, may you die sonless!" sounded the little nun's voice tearfully in the distance.

Ah Q roared with delighted laughter.

The men in the wineshop roared too, with only slightly less satisfaction.

CHAPTER 4

THE TRAGEDY OF LOVE

There are said to be some victors who take no pleasure in a victory unless their opponents are as fierce as tigers or eagles: if their adversaries are as timid as sheep or chickens they find their triumph empty. There are other victors who, having carried all before them, with the enemy slain or surrendering and cowering in utter subjection, realize that now they are left with no foe, rival, or friend — they have only themselves, supreme, solitary, desolate, and forlorn. And then they find their triumph a tragedy. But our hero was not so spineless. He was always exultant. This may be a proof of the moral supremacy of China over the rest of the world.

Look at Ah Q, light and elated, as if about to fly!

This victory was not without strange consequences, though. For quite a time he seemed to be flying, and he flew into the Tutelary God's Temple, where he would normally have snored as soon as he lay down. This evening, however, he found it very difficult to close his eyes, for he felt as if there were something the matter with his thumb and first finger, which seemed to be smoother than usual. It is impossible to say whether something soft and smooth on the little nun's face had stuck to his fingers, or whether his fingers had been rubbed smooth against her cheek.

"Ah Q, may you die sonless!"

These words sounded again in Ah Q's ears, and he thought, "Quite right, I should take a wife; for if a man dies sonless he has no one to sacrifice a bowl of rice to his spirit . . . I ought to have a wife." As the saying goes, "There are three forms of unfilial conduct, of which the worst is to have no descendants,"* and it is one of the tragedies of life that "spirits without descendants go hungry."** Thus his view was absolutely in accordance with the teachings of the saints and sages, and it is indeed a pity that later he should have run amok.

"Woman, woman! . . ." he thought.

". . . The monk paws. . . . Woman, woman! . . . Woman!" he thought again.

We shall never know when Ah Q finally fell asleep that evening. After this, however, he probably always found his fingers rather soft and smooth, and always remained a little light-headed. "Woman . . ." he kept thinking.

* A quotation from Mencius (372-289 B.C.).

** A quotation from the old classic *Tso Chuan*.

From this we can see that woman is a menace to mankind.

The majority of Chinese men could become saints and sages, were it not for the unfortunate fact that they are ruined by women. The Shang Dynasty was destroyed by Ta Chi, the Chou Dynasty was undermined by Pao Szu; as for the Chin Dynasty, although there is no historical evidence to that effect, yet if we assume that it fell on account of some woman we shall probably not be far wrong. And it is a fact that Tung Cho's death was caused by Tiao Chan.*

Ah Q, too, had been a man of strict morals to begin with. Although we do not know whether he was guided by some good teacher, he had always shown himself most scrupulous in observing "strict segregation of the sexes," and was righteous enough to denounce such heretics as the little nun and the Imitation Foreign Devil. His view was, "All nuns must carry on in secret with monks. When a woman walks alone on the street, she must be wanting to seduce bad men. When a man and a woman talk together, they must be arranging to meet." In order to correct such people, he would glare furiously, pass loud, cutting remarks, or, if the place were deserted, throw a small stone from behind.

Who could tell that close on thirty, when a man should "stand firm,"** he would lose his head like this over a little nun? Such light-headedness, according to the classical canons, is most repreh-

* Ta Chi, of the twelfth century B.C., was the concubine of the last king of the Shang Dynasty. Pao Szu, of the eighth century B.C., was the concubine of the last king of the Western Chou Dynasty. Tiao Chan was the concubine of Tung Cho, a powerful minister of the third century B.C.

** Confucius said that at thirty he "stood firm." The phrase was later used to indicate that a man was thirty years old.

sible; thus women certainly are hateful creatures. For if the little nun's face had not been soft and smooth, Ah Q would not have been bewitched by her; nor would this have happened if the little nun's face had been covered by a cloth. Five or six years before, when watching an open-air opera, he had pinched the leg of a woman in the audience; but because it was separated from him by the cloth of her trousers he had not had this light-headed feeling afterwards. The little nun had not covered her face, however, and this is another proof of the odiousness of the heretic.

"Woman . . ." thought Ah Q.

He kept a close watch on those women who he believed must be "wanting to seduce bad men," but they did not smile at him. He listened very carefully to those women who talked to him, but not one of them mentioned anything relevant to a secret rendezvous. Ah! this was simply another example of the odiousness of women: they all assumed a false modesty.

One day when Ah Q was grinding rice in Mr. Chao's house, he sat down in the kitchen after supper to smoke a pipe. If it had been anyone else's house, he could have gone home after supper, but they dined early in the Chao family. Although it was the rule that you must not light a lamp, but go to bed after eating, there were occasional exceptions to the rule: before Mr. Chao's son passed the county examination he was allowed to light a lamp to study the examination essays; and when Ah Q came to do odd jobs he was allowed to light a lamp to grind rice. Because of this latter exception to the rule, Ah Q was still sitting in the kitchen smoking before going on with his work.

When Amah Wu, the only maidservant in the Chao household, had finished washing the dishes, she sat down too on the long bench and started chatting to Ah Q:

"Our mistress hasn't eaten anything for two days, because the master wants to get a concubine. . . ."

"Woman . . . Amah Wu . . . this little widow," thought Ah Q.

"Our young mistress is going to have a baby in the eighth moon. . . ."

"Woman . . ." thought Ah Q.

He put down his pipe and stood up.

"Our young mistress —" Amah Wu chattered on.

"Sleep with me!" Ah Q suddenly rushed forward and threw himself at her feet.

There was a moment of absolute silence.

"Ai ya!" Dumbfounded for an instant, Amah Wu suddenly began to tremble, then rushed out shrieking and could soon be heard sobbing.

Ah Q kneeling opposite the wall was dumbfounded too. He grasped the empty bench with both hands and stood up slowly, dimly aware that something was wrong. In fact, by this time he was in rather a nervous state himself. In a flurry, he stuck his pipe into his belt and decided to go back to the rice. But — bang! — a heavy blow landed on his head, and he spun round to see the successful county candidate standing before him brandishing a big bamboo pole.

"How dare you . . . you. . . ."

The big bamboo pole came down across Ah Q's shoulders. And when he put up both hands to protect his head, the blow landed on his knuckles, causing him considerable pain. As he was escaping through the kitchen door it seemed as if his back also received a blow.

"Turtle's egg!" shouted the successful candidate, cursing him in mandarin from behind.

Ah Q fled to the hulling-floor where he stood alone, still feeling a pain in his knuckles and still remembering that "turtle's egg" because it was an expression never used by the Weichuang villagers, but only by the rich who had seen something of official life. This had made him more frightened, and left an exceptionally deep impression on his mind. By now, however, all thought of "Woman . . ." had flown. After this cursing and beating it seemed as if something was done with, and he began quite light-heartedly to grind rice again. After grinding for a time he grew hot, and stopped to take off his shirt.

While he was taking off his shirt he heard an uproar outside, and since Ah Q always liked to join in any excitement that was going, he went out in search of the sound. He traced it gradually right into Mr. Chao's inner courtyard. Although it was dusk he could see many people there: all the Chao family including the mistress who had not eaten for two days. In addition, there was their neighbour Mrs. Tsou, as well as their relatives Chao Pai-yen and Chao Szu-chen.

The young mistress was leading Amah Wu out of the servants' quarters, saying as she did so:

"Come outside . . . don't stay brooding in your own room."

"Everybody knows you are a good woman," put in Mrs. Tsou from the side. "You mustn't think of committing suicide."

Amah Wu merely wailed, muttering something inaudible.

"This is interesting," thought Ah Q. "What mischief can this little widow be up to?" Wanting to find out, he was approaching Chao Szu-chen when sud-

denly he caught sight of Mr. Chao's eldest son rushing towards him with, what was more, the big bamboo pole in his hand. The sight of this big bamboo pole reminded him that he had been beaten by it, and he realized that apparently he was connected in some way with this scene of excitement. He turned and ran, hoping to escape to the hulling-floor, not foreseeing that the bamboo pole would cut off his retreat; thereupon he turned and ran in the other direction, leaving without further ado by the back door. In a short time he was back in the Tutelary God's Temple.

After Ah Q had sat down for a time, his skin began to form goose pimples and he felt cold, because although it was spring the nights were still quite frosty and not suited to bare backs. He remembered that he had left his shirt in the Chao house, but he was afraid if he went to fetch it he might get another taste of the successful candidate's bamboo pole.

Then the bailiff came in.

"Curse you, Ah Q!" said the bailiff. "So you can't even keep your hands off the Chao family servants, you rebel! You've made me lose my sleep, curse you! . . ."

Under this torrent of abuse Ah Q naturally had nothing to say. Finally, since it was night-time, Ah Q had to pay double and give the bailiff four hundred cash. But because he happened to have no ready money by him, he gave his felt hat as security, and agreed to the following five terms:

1. The next morning Ah Q must take a pair of red candles, weighing one pound, and a bundle of incense sticks to the Chao family to atone for his misdeeds.
2. Ah Q must pay for the Taoist priests whom the Chao family had called to exorcize evil spirits.

3. Ah Q must never again set foot in the Chao household.
4. If anything unfortunate should happen to Amah Wu, Ah Q must be held responsible.
5. Ah Q must not go back for his wages or shirt.

Ah Q naturally agreed to everything, but unfortunately he had no ready money. Luckily it was already spring, so it was possible to do without his padded quilt which he pawned for two thousand cash to comply with the terms stipulated. After kowtowing with bare back he still had a few cash left, but instead of using these to redeem his felt hat from the bailiff, he spent them all on drink.

Actually, the Chao family burnt neither the incense nor the candles, because these could be used when the mistress worshipped Buddha and were put aside for that purpose. Most of the ragged shirt was made into diapers for the baby which was born to the young mistress in the eighth moon, while the tattered remainder was used by Amah Wu to make shoe soles.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROBLEM OF LIVELIHOOD

After Ah Q had kowtowed and complied with the Chao family terms, he went back as usual to the Tutelary God's Temple. The sun had gone down, and he began to feel that something was wrong. Careful thought led him to the conclusion that this was probably because his back was bare. Remembering that he still had a ragged lined jacket, he put it on and

lay down, and when he opened his eyes again the sun was already shining on the top of the west wall. He sat up, saying, "Curse it. . . ."

After getting up he loafed about the streets as usual, until he began to feel that something else was wrong, though this was not to be compared to the physical discomfort of a bare back. Apparently, from that day onwards all the women in Weichuang became shy of Ah Q: whenever they saw him coming they would take refuge indoors. In fact, even Mrs. Tsou who was nearly fifty years old retreated in confusion with the rest, calling her eleven-year-old daughter to go inside. This struck Ah Q as very strange. "The bitches!" he thought. "They have suddenly become as coy as young ladies. . . ."

A good many days later, however, he felt even more strongly that something was wrong. First, the wine-shop refused him credit; secondly, the old man in charge of the Tutelary God's Temple made some uncalled-for remarks, as if he wanted Ah Q to leave; and thirdly, for many days—how many exactly he could not remember—not a soul had come to hire him. To be refused credit in the wineshop he could put up with; if the old man kept urging him to leave, Ah Q could just ignore his complaints; but when no one came to hire him he had to go hungry; and this was really a "cursed" state to be in.

When Ah Q could stand it no longer he went to his regular employers' houses to find out what was the matter—it was only Mr. Chao's threshold that he was not allowed to cross. But he met with a very strange reception. The one to appear was always a man, who looked thoroughly annoyed and waved Ah Q away as if he were a beggar, saying:

"There is nothing, nothing at all! Go away!"

Ah Q found it more and more extraordinary. "These people always needed help in the past," he thought. "They can't suddenly have nothing to be done. This looks fishy." And after making careful enquiries he found out that when they had any odd jobs they all called in Young D on. Now this Young D was a lean and weakly pauper, even lower in Ah Q's eyes than Whiskers Wang. Who could have thought that this low fellow would steal his living from him? So this time Ah Q's indignation was greater than usual, and going on his way, fuming, he suddenly raised his arm and sang: "*I'll thrash you with a steel mace. . . .*"*

A few days later he did indeed meet Young D in front of Mr. Chien's house. "When two foes meet, their eyes flash fire." As Ah Q went up to him, Young D stood still.

"Stupid ass!" hissed Ah Q, glaring furiously and foaming at the mouth.

"I'm an insect—will that do? . . ." asked Young D.

Such modesty only made Ah Q angrier than ever, but since he had no steel mace in his hand all he could do was to rush forward with outstretched hand to seize Young D's pigtail. Young D, protecting his pigtail with one hand, with the other tried to seize Ah Q's, whereupon Ah Q also used one free hand to protect his own pigtail. In the past Ah Q had never considered Young D worth taking seriously, but since he had recently suffered from hunger himself he was now as thin and weakly as his opponent, so that they presented a spectacle of evenly matched antagonists. Four hands clutched at two heads, both men bending

* A line from *The Battle of Dragon and Tiger*, an opera popular in Shaohsing. It told how Chao Kuang-yin, the first emperor of the Sung Dynasty, fought with another general.

at the waist, casting a blue, rainbow-shaped shadow on the Chien family's white wall for over half an hour.

"All right! All right!" exclaimed some of the on-lookers, probably trying to make peace.

"Good, good!" exclaimed others, but whether to make peace, applaud the fighters or incite them on to further efforts, is not certain.

The two combatants turned deaf ears to them all, however. If Ah Q advanced three paces, Young D would recoil three paces, and so they would stand. If Young D advanced three paces, Ah Q would recoil three paces, and so they would stand again. After about half an hour — Weichuang had few striking clocks, so it is difficult to tell the time; it may have been twenty minutes — when steam was rising from both their heads and perspiration pouring down their cheeks, Ah Q let fall his hands, and in the same second Young D's hands fell too. They straightened up simultaneously and stepped back simultaneously, pushing their way out through the crowd.

"You'll be hearing from me again, curse you! . . ." said Ah Q over his shoulder.

"Curse you! You'll be hearing from me again . . ." echoed Young D, also over his shoulder.

This epic struggle had apparently ended neither in victory nor defeat, and it is not known whether the spectators were satisfied or not, for none of them expressed any opinion. But still not a soul came to hire Ah Q.

One warm day, when a balmy breeze seemed to give some foretaste of summer, Ah Q actually began to feel cold; but he could put up with this — his greatest worry was an empty stomach. His cotton quilt, felt hat and shirt had disappeared long ago, and after that he had sold his padded jacket. Now noth-

ing was left but his trousers, and these of course he could not take off. He had a ragged lined jacket, it is true; but this was certainly worthless, unless he gave it away to be made into shoe soles. He had long been hoping to pick up a sum of money on the road, but hitherto he had not been successful; he had also hoped he might suddenly discover a sum of money in his tumbledown room, and had looked wildly all around it, but the room was quite, quite empty. Thereupon he made up his mind to go out in search of food.

As he was walking along the road "in search of food" he saw the familiar wineshop and the familiar steamed bread, but he passed them by without pausing for a second, without even hankering after them. It was not these he was looking for, although what exactly he was looking for he did not know himself.

Weichuang was not a big place, and soon he had left it behind. Most of the country outside the village consisted of paddy fields, green as far as the eye could see with the tender shoots of young rice, dotted here and there with round, black, moving objects, which were peasants cultivating the fields. But blind to the delights of country life, Ah Q simply went on his way, for he knew instinctively that this was far removed from his "search for food." Finally, however, he came to the walls of the Convent of Quiet Self-improvement.

The convent too was surrounded by paddy fields, its white walls standing out sharply in the fresh green, and inside the low earthen wall at the back was a vegetable garden. Ah Q hesitated for a time, looking around him. Since there was no one in sight he scrambled on to the low wall, holding on to some milkwort. The mud wall started crumbling, and Ah Q shook with fear; however, by clutching at the

branch of a mulberry tree he managed to jump inside. Within was a wild profusion of vegetation, but no sign of yellow wine, steamed bread, or anything edible. By the west wall was a clump of bamboos, with many bamboo shoots, but unfortunately these were not cooked. There was also rape which had long since gone to seed; the mustard was already about to flower, and the small cabbages looked very tough.

Ah Q felt as resentful as a scholar who has failed in the examinations, and was walking slowly towards the gate of the garden when he gave a start for joy, for there before him what should he see but a patch of turnips! As he knelt down and began picking, a round head suddenly appeared from behind the gate, only to be withdrawn again at once, and this was no other than the little nun. Now though Ah Q had always had the greatest contempt for such people as little nuns, there are times when "Discretion is the better part of valour." He hastily pulled up four turnips, tore off the leaves and folded them in his jacket. By this time an old nun had already come out.

"May Buddha preserve us, Ah Q! What made you climb into our garden to steal turnips! . . . Oh dear, what a wicked thing to do! Oh dear, Buddha preserve us! . . ."

"When did I ever climb into your garden and steal turnips?" retorted Ah Q, looking at her as he started off.

"Now — aren't you?" said the old nun, pointing at the folds of his jacket.

"Are these yours? Can you make them answer you? You. . . ."

Leaving his sentence unfinished, Ah Q took to his heels as fast as he could, followed by an enormously fat, black dog. This dog had originally been at the

front gate, and it was a mystery how it had reached the back garden. The black dog gave chase, snarling, and was just about to bite Ah Q's leg when a turnip fell most opportunely from the latter's jacket, and the dog, taken by surprise, stopped for a second. During this time Ah Q scrambled up the mulberry tree, scaled the mud wall and fell, turnips and all, outside the convent. He left the black dog still barking by the mulberry tree, and the old nun saying her prayers.

Fearing that the nun would let the black dog out again, Ah Q gathered together his turnips and ran, picking up a few small stones as he went. But the black dog did not reappear. Ah Q threw away the stones and walked on, eating as he went, thinking to himself: "There is nothing to be had here; I had better go to town. . . ."

By the time he had finished the third turnip, he had made up his mind to go to town.

CHAPTER 6

FROM RESTORATION TO DECLINE

Weichuang did not see Ah Q again till just after the Moon Festival that year. Everybody was surprised to hear of his return, and this made them think back and wonder where he had been all this time. The few previous occasions on which Ah Q had been to town, he had usually informed people in advance with great gusto; but since he had not done so this time, no one had noticed his going. He might have told the old man in charge of the Tutelary God's Temple,

but according to the custom of Weichuang it was only when Mr. Chao, Mr. Chien, or the successful county candidate went to town that it was considered important. Even the Imitation Foreign Devil's going was not talked about, much less Ah Q's. This would explain why the old man had not spread the news for him, with the result that the villagers had had no means of knowing it.

But Ah Q's return this time was very different from before, and in fact quite enough to occasion astonishment. The day was growing dark when he appeared blinking sleepily before the door of the wineshop, walked up to the counter, pulled a handful of silver and coppers from his belt and tossed them on the counter. "Cash!" he said. "Bring the wine!" He was wearing a new, lined jacket, and evidently a large purse hung at his waist, the great weight of which caused his belt to sag in a sharp curve. It was the custom in Weichuang that when there seemed to be something unusual about anyone, he should be treated with respect rather than insolence, and now, although they knew quite well that this was Ah Q, still he was very different from the Ah Q of the ragged coat. The ancients say, "A scholar who has been away three days must be looked at with new eyes," and so the waiter, innkeeper, customers and passers-by, all quite naturally expressed a kind of suspicion mingled with respect. The innkeeper started by nodding, then said:

"Hullo, Ah Q, so you're back!"

"Yes, I'm back."

"You've made money . . . er . . . where . . . ?"

"I went to town."

By the next day this piece of news had spread through Weichuang. And since everybody wanted to hear the success story of this Ah Q of the ready

money and the new lined jacket, in the wineshop, tea-house, and under the temple eaves, the villagers gradually ferreted out the news. The result was that they began to treat Ah Q with a new deference.

According to Ah Q, he had been a servant in the house of a successful provincial candidate. This part of the story filled all who heard it with awe. This successful provincial candidate was named Pai, but because he was the only successful provincial candidate in the whole town there was no need to use his surname: whenever anyone spoke of the successful provincial candidate, it meant him. And this was so not only in Weichuang but everywhere within a radius of thirty miles, as if everybody imagined his name to be Mr. Successful Provincial Candidate. To have worked in the household of such a man naturally called for respect; but according to Ah Q's further statements, he was unwilling to go on working there because this successful candidate was really too much of a "turtle's egg." This part of the story made all who heard it sigh, but with a sense of pleasure, because it showed that Ah Q was actually not fit to work in such a man's household, yet not to work was a pity.

According to Ah Q, his return was also due to the fact that he was not satisfied with the townspeople because they called a long bench a straight bench, used shredded shallots to fry fish, and — a defect he had recently discovered — the women did not sway in a very satisfactory manner as they walked. However, the town had its good points too; for instance, in Weichuang everyone played with thirty-two bamboo counters, and only the Imitation Foreign Devil could play mah-jong, but in town even the street urchins excelled at mah-jong. You had only to place the Imitation Foreign Devil in the hands of these

young rascals in their teens, for him straightway to become like "a small devil before the King of Hell." This part of the story made all who heard it blush.

"Have you seen an execution?" asked Ah Q. "Ah, that's a fine sight. . . . When they execute the revolutionaries. . . . Ah, that's a fine sight, a fine sight. . . ." As he shook his head, his spittle flew on to the face of Chao Szu-chen directly opposite. This part of the story made all who heard it tremble. Then with a glance around, he suddenly raised his right hand and dropped it on the neck of Whiskers Wang, who was listening raptly with his head thrust forward.

"Kill!" shouted Ah Q.

Whiskers Wang gave a start, and drew in his head as fast as lightning or a spark struck from a flint, while the bystanders shivered with pleasurable apprehension. After this, Whiskers Wang went about in a daze for many days, and dared not go near Ah Q, nor did the others.

Although we cannot say Ah Q's status in the eyes of the inhabitants of Weichuang at this time was superior to that of Mr. Chao, we can at least affirm without any danger of inaccuracy that it was about the same.

Not long after, Ah Q's fame suddenly spread into the women's apartments of Weichuang too. Although the only two families of any pretensions in Weichuang were those of Chien and Chao, and nine-tenths of the rest were poor, still women's apartments are women's apartments, and this spreading of Ah Q's fame into them was something of a miracle. When the womenfolk met they would say to each other, "Mrs. Tsou bought a blue silk skirt from Ah Q. Although it was old, still it only cost ninety cents. And Chao Pai-yen's mother (this has yet to be verified, because some say it was Chao Szu-chen's mother)

bought a child's costume of crimson foreign calico, which was nearly new, only spending three hundred cash, less eight per cent discount."

Then those who had no silk skirt or needed foreign calico were most anxious to see Ah Q in order to buy from him. Far from avoiding him now, they would sometimes follow him when he passed, calling to him to stop.

"Ah Q, have you any more silk skirts?" they would ask. "No? We want foreign calico too. Do you have any?"

This news later spread from the poor households to the rich ones, because Mrs. Tsou was so pleased with her silk skirt that she took it to Mrs. Chao for her approval, and Mrs. Chao told Mr. Chao, speaking very highly of it.

Mr. Chao discussed the matter that evening at dinner with his son, the successful county candidate, suggesting that there must be something queer about Ah Q, and that they should be more careful about their doors and windows. They did not know, though, whether Ah Q had any things left or not, and thought he might still have something good. And Mrs. Chao happened to be wanting a good, cheap, fur vest. So after a family council it was decided to ask Mrs. Tsou to find Ah Q for them at once, and for this a third exception was made to the rule, special permission being given for a lamp to be lit that evening.

A considerable amount of oil had been burnt, but still there was no sign of Ah Q. The whole Chao household was yawning with impatience, some of them resenting Ah Q's undisciplined ways, some of them angrily blaming Mrs. Tsou for not trying harder to get him there. Mrs. Chao was afraid that Ah Q dared not come because of the terms agreed upon that spring, but Mr. Chao did not think this anything

to worry about, because, as he said, "This time I sent for him." And sure enough, Mr. Chao proved himself a man of insight, for Ah Q finally arrived with Mrs. Tsou.

"He keeps saying he has nothing left," panted Mrs. Tsou as she came in. "When I told him to come and tell you so himself he would go on talking. I told him. . . ."

"Sir!" said Ah Q with an attempt at a smile, coming to a halt under the eaves.

"I hear you got rich out there, Ah Q," said Mr. Chao, going up to him and looking him carefully over. "Very good. Now . . . they say you have some old things. . . . Bring them all here for us to have a look at. . . . This is simply because I happen to want. . . ."

"I told Mrs. Tsou — there is nothing left."

"Nothing left?" Mr. Chao could not help sounding disappointed. "How could they go so quickly?"

"They belonged to a friend, and there was not much to begin with. People bought some. . . ."

"There must be something left."

"Now there is only a door curtain left."

"Then bring the door curtain for us to see," said Mrs. Chao hurriedly.

"Well, it will be all right if you bring it tomorrow," said Mr. Chao without much enthusiasm. "When you have anything in future, Ah Q, you must bring it to us first. . . ."

"We certainly will not pay less than other people!" said the successful county candidate. His wife shot a hasty glance at Ah Q to see his reaction.

"I need a fur vest," said Mrs. Chao.

Although Ah Q agreed, he slouched out so carelessly that they did not know whether he had taken their instructions to heart or not. This made Mr.

Chao so disappointed, annoyed and worried that he even stopped yawning. The successful candidate was also far from satisfied with Ah Q's attitude, and said, "People should be on their guard against such a turtle's egg. It might be best to order the bailiff not to allow him to live in Weichuang."

But Mr. Chao did not agree, saying that he might bear a grudge, and that in a business like his it was probably a case of "the eagle does not prey on its own nest": his own village need not worry, and they need only be a little more watchful at night. The successful candidate was much impressed by this parental instruction, and immediately withdrew his proposal for driving Ah Q away, cautioning Mrs. Tsou on no account to repeat what he had said.

The next day, however, when Mrs. Tsou took her blue skirt to be dyed black she repeated these insinuations about Ah Q, although not actually mentioning what the successful candidate had said about driving him away. But even so, it was most damaging to Ah Q. In the first place, the bailiff appeared at his door and took away the door curtain. Although Ah Q protested that Mrs. Chao wanted to see it, the bailiff would not give it back, and even demanded a monthly payment of hush-money. In the second place, the villagers' respect for him suddenly changed. Although they still dared not take liberties, they avoided him as much as possible. And while this differed from their previous fear of his "Kill!", it closely resembled the attitude of the ancients to spirits: keeping a respectful distance.

But there were some idlers who wanted to get to the bottom of the business, who went to question Ah Q carefully. And with no attempt at concealment, Ah Q told them proudly of his experiences. They learned that he had merely been a petty thief, not

only unable to climb walls, but even unable to go through openings: he simply stood outside an opening to receive the stolen goods.

One night he had just received a package and his chief had gone in again, when he heard a great uproar inside, and took to his heels as fast as he could. He fled from the town that same night, back to Wei-chuang; and after this he dared not return to that business. This story, however, was even more damaging to Ah Q, since the villagers had been keeping a respectful distance because they did not want to incur his enmity; for who could have guessed that he was only a thief who dared not steal again? But now they knew he was really too low to inspire fear.

CHAPTER 7

THE REVOLUTION

On the fourteenth day of the ninth moon of the third year in the reign of Emperor Hsuan Tung* — the day on which Ah Q sold his purse to Chao Pai-yen — at midnight, after the fourth stroke of the third watch, a large boat with a big black awning came to the Chao family's landing place. This boat floated up in the darkness while the villagers were sound asleep, so that they knew nothing about it; but it left again about dawn, when quite a number of people saw it. Investigation revealed that this boat actually belonged to the successful provincial candidate!

* The day on which Shaohsing was freed in the 1911 Revolution.

This boat caused great uneasiness in Weichuang, and before midday the hearts of all the villagers were beating faster. The Chao family kept very quiet about the errand of the boat, but according to the gossip in the tea-house and wineshop, the revolutionaries were going to enter the town and the successful provincial candidate had come to the country to take refuge. Mrs. Tsou alone thought otherwise, maintaining that the successful provincial candidate had merely wanted to deposit a few battered cases in Weichuang, but Mr. Chao had sent them back. Actually the successful provincial candidate and the successful county candidate in the Chao family were not on good terms, so that it was scarcely logical to expect them to prove friends in adversity; moreover, since Mrs. Tsou was a neighbour of the Chao family and had a better idea of what was going on, she ought to have known.

Then a rumour spread to the effect that although the scholar had not arrived himself, he had sent a long letter tracing some distant relationship with the Chao family; and Mr. Chao after thinking it over had decided it could, after all, do him no harm to keep the cases, so they were now stowed under his wife's bed. As for the revolutionaries, some people said they had entered the town that night in white helmets and white armour — the mourning dress for Emperor Tsung Cheng.*

Ah Q had long since heard of the revolutionaries, and this year had with his own eyes seen revolutionaries being decapitated. But since it had occurred to him that the revolutionaries were rebels and that

* Tsung Cheng, the last emperor of the Ming Dynasty, reigned from 1628 to 1644. He hanged himself before the Manchus entered Peking.

a rebellion would make things difficult for him, he had always detested and kept away from them. Who could have guessed they could so frighten a successful provincial candidate renowned for thirty miles around? In consequence, Ah Q could not help feeling rather "entranced," the terror of all the villagers only adding to his delight.

"Revolution is not a bad thing," thought Ah Q. "Finish off the whole lot of them . . . curse them! . . . I would like to go over to the revolutionaries myself."

Ah Q had been hard up recently, and was probably rather dissatisfied; added to this was the fact that he had drunk two bowls of wine at noon on an empty stomach. Consequently, he got drunk more quickly than ever; and as he walked along thinking to himself, he felt again as if he were treading on air. Suddenly, in some curious way, he felt as if the revolutionaries were himself, and all the people in Weichuang were his captives. Unable to contain himself for joy, he could not help shouting loudly:

"Rebellion! Rebellion!"

All the villagers looked at him in consternation. Ah Q had never seen such pitiful looks before, and found them as refreshing as a drink of iced water in mid-summer. So he walked on even more happily, shouting:

"All right . . . I shall take what I want! I shall like whom I please!

"Tra la, tra la!"

"I regret to have killed by mistake my sworn brother Cheng, in my cups.

"I regret to have killed. . . . Yah, yah, yah!"

"Tra la, tra la, tum ti tum tum!"

"I'll thrash you with a steel mace."

Mr. Chao and his son were standing at their gate with two relatives discussing the revolution. But Ah

Q did not see them as he went past singing with his head thrown back: "*Tra la la, tum ti tum!*"

"Q, old chap!" called Mr. Chao timidly in a low voice.

"*Tra la!*" sang Ah Q, unable to imagine that his name could be linked with those words "old chap." Sure that he had heard wrongly and was in no way concerned, he simply went on singing, "*Tra la la, tum ti tum!*"

"Q, old chap!"

"*I regret to have killed. . . .*"

"Ah Q!" The successful candidate had to call his name.

Only then did Ah Q come to a stop. "Well?" he asked with his head on one side.

"Q, old chap . . . now. . . ." But Mr. Chao was at a loss for words again. "Are you getting rich now?"

"Getting rich? Of course. I take what I like. . . ."

"Ah — Q, old man, poor friends of yours like us can't possibly matter . . ." said Chao Pai-yen apprehensively, as if sounding out the revolutionaries' attitude.

"Poor friends? Surely you are richer than I am," said Ah Q, and walked away.

They stood there despondent and speechless; then Mr. Chao and his son went back to the house, and that evening discussed the question until it was time to light the lamps. When Chao Pai-yen went home he took the purse from his waist and gave it to his wife to hide for him at the bottom of a chest.

For some time Ah Q seemed to be walking on air, but by the time he reached the Tutelary God's Temple he was sober again. That evening the old man in charge of the temple was also unexpectedly friendly and offered him tea. Then Ah Q asked him for two flat cakes, and after eating these demanded

a four-ounce candle that had been used, and a candlestick. He lit the candle and lay down alone in his little room. He felt inexpressibly refreshed and happy, while the candlelight leapt and flickered as on the Lantern Festival and his imagination too seemed to soar.

"Revolt? It would be fun. . . . A group of revolutionaries would come, all wearing white helmets and white armour, carrying swords, steel maces, bombs, foreign guns, double-edged knives with sharp points and spears with hooks. They would come to the Tutelary God's Temple and call out, 'Ah Q! Come with us, come with us!' And then I would go with them. . . .

"Then all those villagers would be in a laughable plight, kneeling down and pleading, 'Ah Q, spare our lives.' But who would listen to them! The first to die would be Young D and Mr. Chao, then the successful county candidate and the Imitation Foreign Devil . . . but perhaps I would spare a few. I would once have spared Whiskers Wang, but now I don't even want him either. . . .

"Things . . . I would go straight in and open the cases: silver ingots, foreign coins, foreign calico jackets. . . . First I would move the successful county candidate's wife's Ningpo bed to the temple, and also move in the Chien family tables and chairs—or else just use the Chao family's. I would not lift a finger myself, but order Young D to move the things for me, and to look smart about it, unless he wanted a slap in the face. . . .

"Chao Szu-chen's younger sister is very ugly. In a few years Mrs. Tsou's daughter might be worth considering. The Imitation Foreign Devil's wife is willing to sleep with a man without a pigtail, hah! She can't be a good woman! The successful county

candidate's wife has scars on her eyelids. . . . I have not seen Amah Wu for a long time, and don't know where she is — what a pity her feet are so big."

Before Ah Q had reached a satisfactory conclusion, there was a sound of snoring. The four-ounce candle had burnt down only half an inch, and its flickering red light lit up his open mouth.

"Ho, ho!" shouted Ah Q suddenly, raising his head and looking wildly around. But when he saw the four-ounce candle, he lay back and went to sleep again.

The next morning he got up very late, and when he went out to the street everything was the same as usual. He was still hungry, but though he racked his brains he did not seem able to think of anything. Then suddenly an idea came to him, and he walked slowly off, until either by design or accident he reached the Convent of Quiet Self-improvement.

The convent was as peaceful as it had been that spring, with its white wall and shining black gate. After a moment's reflection, he knocked at the gate, whereupon a dog started barking within. He hastily picked up several pieces of broken brick, then went up again to knock more heavily, knocking until a number of small dents appeared on the black gate. And at last he heard someone coming to open the door.

Ah Q hastily got ready his broken bricks, and stood with his legs wide apart, prepared to do battle with the black dog. But the convent door only opened a crack, and no black dog rushed out. When he looked in all he could see was the old nun.

"What are you here for again?" she asked, giving a start.

"There is a revolution . . . did you know?" said Ah Q vaguely.

"Revolution, revolution . . . there has already been one," said the old nun, her eyes red from crying. "What do you think will become of us with all your revolutions?"

"What?" asked Ah Q in astonishment.

"Didn't you know? The revolutionaries have already been here!"

"Who?" asked Ah Q in even greater astonishment.

"The successful county candidate and the Imitation Foreign Devil."

This came as a complete surprise to Ah Q, who could not help being taken aback. When the old nun saw that he had lost his aggressiveness, she quickly shut the gate, so that when Ah Q pushed it again he could not budge it, and when he knocked again there was no answer.

It had happened that morning. The successful county candidate in the Chao family got news quickly, and as soon as he heard that the revolutionaries had entered the town that night, he had immediately wound his pigtail up on his head and gone out first thing to call on the Imitation Foreign Devil in the Chien family, with whom he had never been on good terms. This was a time for all to work for reforms, so they had had a very pleasant talk and became on the spot comrades who saw eye to eye and pledged themselves to become revolutionaries.

After racking their brains for some time, they remembered that in the Convent of Quiet Self-improvement was an imperial tablet inscribed "Long Live the Emperor" which ought to be done away with at once. Thereupon they lost no time in going to the convent to carry out their revolutionary activities. Because the old nun tried to stop them, and put in a few words, they considered her as the Manchu government and knocked her many times on the head

with a stick and with their knuckles. The nun, pulling herself together after they had gone, made an inspection. Naturally the imperial tablet had been smashed into fragments on the ground, but the valuable Hsuan Te censor* before the shrine of Kuan-yin, the goddess of mercy, had also disappeared.

Ah Q only learned this later. He deeply regretted having been asleep at the time, and resented the fact that they had not come to call him. But then he said to himself, "Maybe they still don't know I have joined the revolutionaries."

CHAPTER 8

BARRED FROM THE REVOLUTION

The people of Weichuang became more reassured every day. From the news that was brought they knew that, although the revolutionaries had entered the town, their coming had not made a great deal of difference. The magistrate was still the highest official, it was only his title that had changed; and the successful provincial candidate also had some post—the Weichuang villagers could not remember these names clearly—some kind of official post; while the head of the military was still the same old captain. The only cause for alarm was that there were also some bad revolutionaries making trouble, who had started cutting off people's pigtails the day after their arrival. It was said that the boatman

* Highly decorative bronze censers were made during the Hsuan Te period (1426-1435) of the Ming Dynasty.

"Seven Pounds" from the next village had fallen into their clutches, and that he no longer looked presentable. Still, the danger of this was not great, because the Weichuang villagers seldom went to town to begin with, and those who had been considering a trip to town at once changed their plans in order to avoid this risk. Ah Q had been thinking of going to town to look up his old friends, but as soon as he heard the news he gave up the idea in resignation.

It would be wrong, however, to say that there were no reforms in Weichuang. During the next few days the number of people who coiled their pigtails on their heads gradually increased, and, as has already been said, the first to do so was naturally the successful county candidate; the next were Chao Szu-chen and Chao Pai-yen, and after them Ah Q. If it had been summer it would not have been considered strange if everybody had coiled their pigtails on their heads or tied them in knots; but this was late autumn, so that this autumn observance of a summer practice on the part of those who coiled their pigtails could be considered nothing short of a heroic decision, and as far as Weichuang was concerned it could not be said to have had no connection with the reforms.

When Chao Szu-chen approached with the nape of his neck bared, people who saw him would say, "Ah! here comes a revolutionary!"

When Ah Q heard this he was greatly impressed. Although he had long since heard how the successful county candidate had coiled his pigtail on his head, it had never occurred to him to do the same. Only now when he saw that Chao Szu-chen had followed suit was he struck with the idea of doing the same himself, and made up his mind to copy them. He used a bamboo chopstick to twist his pigtail up on

his head, and after hesitating for some time eventually summoned up the courage to go out.

As he walked along the street people looked at him, but nobody said anything. Ah Q was very displeased at first, and then he became very resentful. Recently he had been losing his temper very easily. As a matter of fact his life was no harder than before the revolution, people treated him politely, and the shops no longer demanded payment in cash, yet Ah Q still felt dissatisfied. He thought since a revolution had taken place, it should involve more than this. And then he saw Young D, and the sight made his anger boil over.

Young D had also coiled his pigtail on his head and, what was more, he had actually used a bamboo chopstick to do so too. Ah Q had never imagined that Young D would also have the courage to do this; he certainly could not tolerate such a thing! Who was Young D anyway? He was greatly tempted to seize him then and then, break his bamboo chopstick, let down his pigtail and slap his face several times into the bargain to punish him for forgetting his place and for his presumption in becoming a revolutionary. But in the end he let him off, simply fixing him with a furious glare, spitting, and exclaiming, "Pah!"

These last few days the only one to go to town was the Imitation Foreign Devil. The successful county candidate in the Chao family had thought of using the deposited cases as a pretext to call on the successful provincial candidate, but the danger that he might have his pigtail cut off had made him defer his visit. He had written an extremely formal letter, and asked the Imitation Foreign Devil to take it to town; he had also asked the latter to introduce him to the Liberty Party. When the Imitation Foreign

Devil came back he asked the successful county candidate for four dollars, after which the successful county candidate wore a silver peach on his chest. All the Weichuang villagers were overawed, and said that this was the badge of the Persimmon Oil Party,* equivalent to the rank of a Han Lin.** As a result, Mr. Chao's prestige suddenly increased, far more so in fact than when his son first passed the official examination; consequently he started looking down on everyone else, and, when he saw Ah Q, tended to ignore him a little.

Ah Q was thoroughly discontented at finding himself always ignored, but as soon as he heard of this silver peach he realized at once why he was left out in the cold. Simply to say that you had gone over was not enough to make anyone a revolutionary; nor was it enough merely to wind your pigtail up on your head; the most important thing was to get into touch with the revolutionary party. In all his life he had known only two revolutionaries, one of whom had already lost his head in town, leaving only the Imitation Foreign Devil. Unless he went at once to talk things over with the Imitation Foreign Devil there was no way left open to him.

The front gate of the Chien house happened to be open, and Ah Q crept timidly in. Once inside he gave a start, for there he saw the Imitation Foreign Devil standing in the middle of the courtyard dressed entirely in black, no doubt in foreign dress, and also wearing a silver peach. In his hand he held the stick with which Ah Q was already acquainted to his cost,

* The Liberty Party was called *Tzu Yu Tang*. The villagers, not understanding the word Liberty, turned *Tzu Yu* into *Shih Yu*, which means persimmon oil.

** The highest literary degree in the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911).

and the foot or so of hair which he had grown again fell over his shoulders, hanging dishevelled like Saint Liu's.* Standing erect before him were Chao Pai-yen and three others, all of them listening with the utmost deference to what he was saying.

Ah Q tiptoed inside and stood behind Chao Pai-yen, wanting to utter a greeting, but not knowing what to say. Obviously he could not call the man "Imitation Foreign Devil," and neither "Foreigner" nor "Revolutionary" seemed suitable. Perhaps the best form of address would be "Mr. Foreigner."

But Mr. Foreigner had not seen him, because with eyes raised he was talking most animatedly:

"I am so impulsive that when we met I kept saying, 'Old Hung, we should get on with it!' But he always answered 'Nein!' — that's a foreign word which you wouldn't understand. Otherwise we should have succeeded long ago. This is an instance of how cautious he is. He asked me again and again to go to Hupeh, but I wouldn't agree. Who wants to work in a small district town? . . ."

"Er — er — " Ah Q waited for him to pause, and then screwed up his courage to speak. But for some reason or other he still did not call him Mr. Foreigner.

The four men who had been listening gave a start and turned to stare at Ah Q. Mr. Foreigner too caught sight of him for the first time.

"What?"

"I. . . ."

"Clear out!"

"I want to join. . . ."

"Get out!" said Mr. Foreigner, lifting the "mourner's stick."

* An immortal in Chinese folk legend, always portrayed with flowing hair.

Then Chao Pai-yen and the others shouted, "Mr. Chien tells you to get out, don't you hear!"

Ah Q put up his hands to protect his head, and without knowing what he was doing fled through the gate; but this time Mr. Foreigner did not give chase. After running more than sixty steps Ah Q began to slow down, and now he began to feel most upset, because if Mr. Foreigner would not allow him to be a revolutionary, there was no other way open to him. In future he could never hope to have men in white helmets and white armour coming to call him. All his ambition, aims, hope and future had been blasted at one stroke. The fact that people might spread the news and make him a laughing-stock for the likes of Young D and Whiskers Wang was only a secondary consideration.

Never before had he felt so flat. Even coiling his pigtail on his head now struck him as pointless and ridiculous. As a form of revenge he was very tempted to let his pigtail down at once, but he did not do so. He wandered about till evening, when after drinking two bowls of wine on credit he began to feel in better spirits, and saw again in his mind's eye fragmentary visions of white helmets and white armour.

One day he loafed about until late at night. Only when the wineshop was about to close did he start to stroll back to the Tutelary God's Temple.

"Bang — bump!"

He suddenly heard an unusual sound, which could not have been firecrackers. Ah Q always liked excitement and enjoyed poking his nose into other people's business, so he went looking for the noise in the darkness. He seemed to hear footsteps ahead, and was listening carefully when a man suddenly rushed out in front of him. As soon as Ah Q saw him, he turned and followed him as fast as he could. When

that man turned, Ah Q turned too, and when after turning a corner that man stopped, Ah Q stopped too. He saw there was no one behind, and that the man was Young D.

"What is the matter?" asked Ah Q resentfully.

"Chao . . . the Chao family have been robbed," panted Young D.

Ah Q's heart went pit-a-pat. After telling him this, Young D left. Ah Q ran on and then stopped two or three times. However, since he had once been in the business himself, he felt exceptionally courageous. Emerging from the street corner, he listened carefully and thought he could hear shouting; he also looked carefully and thought he could see a lot of men in white helmets and white armour, carrying off cases, carrying off furniture, even carrying off the Ningpo bed of the successful county candidate's wife; he could not, however, see them very clearly. He wanted to go nearer, but his feet were rooted to the ground.

There was no moon that night, and Weichuang was very still in the pitch darkness, as quiet as in the peaceful days of the ancient Emperor Fu Hsi.* Ah Q stood there until he lost interest, yet everything still seemed the same as before; in the distance were people moving to and fro, carrying things, carrying off cases, carrying off furniture, carrying off the Ningpo bed of the successful county candidate's wife . . . carrying until he could hardly believe his own eyes. But he decided not to go nearer, and went back to the temple.

It was even darker in the Tutelary God's Temple. When he had closed the big gate he groped his way

* One of the earliest legendary monarchs in China.

into his room, and only after he had been lying down for some time did he feel calm enough to begin to think how this affected him. The men in white helmets and white armour had evidently arrived, but they had not come to call him; they had moved out a lot of things, but there was no share for him — this was all the fault of the Imitation Foreign Devil, who had barred him from the rebellion. Otherwise how could he have failed to have a share this time?

The more Ah Q thought of it the angrier he grew, until he was in a towering rage. "So no rebellion for me, only for you, eh?" he exclaimed, nodding maliciously. "Curse you, you Imitation Foreign Devil — all right, be a rebel! A rebel is punished by having his head chopped off. I shall have to turn informer, to see you carried into town to have your head cut off — you and all your family. . . . Kill, kill!"

CHAPTER 9

THE GRAND FINALE

After the Chao family was robbed most of the people in Weichuang felt pleased yet fearful, and Ah Q was no exception. But four days later Ah Q was suddenly dragged into town in the middle of the night. It happened to be a dark night when a squad of soldiers, a squad of militia, a squad of police and five secret servicemen made their way quietly to Weichuang, and under cover of darkness surrounded the Tutelary God's Temple, posting a machine gun opposite the entrance. Yet Ah Q did not rush out. For a long time nothing stirred in the temple. The cap-

tain grew impatient and offered a reward of twenty thousand cash. Only then did two militiamen summon up courage to jump over the wall and enter. Then with co-operation from within, the others rushed in and dragged Ah Q out. But not until he had been carried out of the temple to somewhere near the machine gun did he begin to sober up.

It was already midday by the time they reached town, and Ah Q found himself carried to a dilapidated yamen where, after taking five or six turnings, he was pushed into a small room. No sooner had he stumbled inside than the door, made of wooden bars forming a grating, closed upon his heels. The rest of the room consisted of three blank walls, and when he looked round carefully he saw two other men in a corner of the room.

Although Ah Q was feeling rather uneasy, he was by no means too depressed, because the room where he slept in the Tutelary God's Temple was in no way superior to this. The two other men also seemed to be villagers. They gradually fell into conversation with him, and one of them told him that the successful provincial candidate wanted to dun him for the rent owed by his grandfather; the other did not know why he was there. When they questioned Ah Q, he answered quite frankly, "Because I wanted to revolt."

That afternoon he was dragged out through the barred door and taken to a big hall, at the far end of which was sitting an old man with his head shaved clean. Ah Q first took him for a monk, but when he saw soldiers standing beneath and a dozen men in long coats on both sides, some with their heads clean-shaved like this old man and some with a foot or so of hair hanging over their shoulders like the Imitation Foreign Devil, but all glaring at him furiously from grim faces, then he knew this man must be

someone important. At once the joints of his knees relaxed of their own accord, and he sank down.

"Stand up to speak! Don't kneel!" shouted all the men in the long coats.

Although Ah Q understood, he felt incapable of standing up: his body had involuntarily dropped to a squatting position, and improving on it he finally knelt down.

"Slave! . . ." exclaimed the long-coated men contemptuously. They did not insist on his getting up, however.

"Tell the truth and you will receive a lighter sentence," said the old man with the shaved head, in a low but clear voice, fixing his eyes on Ah Q. "I know everything already. When you have confessed, I will let you go."

"Confess!" repeated the long-coated men loudly.

"The fact is I wanted . . . to come . . ." muttered Ah Q disjointedly, after a moment's confused thinking.

"In that case, why didn't you come?" asked the old man gently.

"The Imitation Foreign Devil wouldn't let me!"

"Nonsense! It is too late to talk now. Where are your accomplices?"

"What? . . ."

"The people who robbed the Chao family that night."

"They didn't come to call me. They moved the things away themselves." Mention of this made Ah Q indignant.

"Where did they go? When you have told me I will let you go," said the old man even more gently.

"I don't know . . . they didn't come to call me. . . ."

Then, at a sign from the old man, Ah Q was dragged again through the barred door. The next time that he was dragged out was the following morning.

Everything was unchanged in the big hall. The old man with the clean-shaved head was still sitting there, and Ah Q knelt down again as before.

"Have you anything else to say?" asked the old man gently.

Ah Q thought, and decided there was nothing to say, so he answered, "Nothing."

Then a man in a long coat brought a sheet of paper and held a brush in front of Ah Q, which he wanted to thrust into his hand. Ah Q was now nearly frightened out of his wits, because this was the first time in his life that his hand had ever come into contact with a writing brush. He was just wondering how to hold it when the man pointed out a place on the paper, and told him to sign his name.

"I—I—can't write," said Ah Q, nervous and shamefaced, holding the brush.

"In that case, to make it easy for you, draw a circle!"

Ah Q tried to draw a circle, but the hand with which he grasped the brush trembled, so the man spread the paper on the ground for him. Ah Q bent down and, as painstakingly as if his life depended on it, drew a circle. Afraid people would laugh at him, he determined to make the circle round; however, not only was that wretched brush very heavy, but it would not do his bidding, wobbling instead from side to side; and just as the line was about to close it swerved out again, making a shape like a melon seed.

While Ah Q was ashamed because he had not been able to draw a round circle, that man had already taken back the paper and brush without any com-

ment; and then a number of people dragged him back for the third time through the barred door.

This time he did not feel particularly irritated. He supposed that in this world it was the fate of everybody at some time to be dragged in and out of prison, and to have to draw circles on paper; it was only because his circle had not been round that he felt there was a blot on his escutcheon. Presently, however, he regained composure by thinking, "Only idiots can make perfect circles." And with this thought he fell asleep.

That night, however, the successful provincial candidate was unable to go to sleep, because he had quarrelled with the captain. The successful provincial candidate had insisted that the most important thing was to recover the stolen goods, while the captain said the most important thing was to make a public example. Recently the captain had come to treat the successful provincial candidate quite disdainfully. So, banging his fist on the table, he said, "Punish one to awe one hundred! See now, I have been a member of the revolutionary party for less than twenty days, but there have been a dozen cases of robbery, none of them solved yet; and think how badly that reflects on me. And now that one case has been solved, you come to argue like a pedant. It won't do! This is my affair."

The successful provincial candidate had been very upset, but had still persisted, saying that if the stolen goods were not recovered, he would resign immediately from his post as assistant civil administrator. "As you please!" said the captain.

In consequence the successful provincial candidate did not sleep that night, but happily he did not hand in his resignation after all the next day.

The third time that Ah Q was dragged out of the barred door, was the morning following the night on which the successful provincial candidate had been unable to sleep. When he reached the big hall, the old man with the clean-shaved head was still sitting there as usual, and Ah Q also knelt down as usual.

Very gently the old man questioned him: "Have you anything more to say?"

Ah Q thought, and decided there was nothing to say, so he answered, "Nothing."

A number of men in long coats and short jackets put on him a white vest of foreign cloth, with some black characters on it. Ah Q felt considerably disconcerted, because this was very like mourning dress, and to wear mourning was unlucky. At the same time his hands were bound behind his back, and he was dragged out of the yamen.

Ah Q was lifted on to an uncovered cart, and several men in short jackets sat down with him. The cart started off at once. In front were a number of soldiers and militiamen shouldering foreign rifles, and on both sides were crowds of gaping spectators, while what was behind Ah Q could not see. But suddenly it occurred to him — "Can I be going to have my head cut off?" Panic seized him and everything turned dark before his eyes, while there was a humming in his ears as if he had fainted. But he did not really faint. Although he felt frightened some of the time, the rest of the time he was quite calm. It seemed to him that in this world probably it was the fate of everybody at some time to have his head cut off.

He still recognized the road and felt rather surprised: why were they not going to the execution ground? He did not know that he was being paraded round the streets as a public example. But if he had

known, it would have been the same; he would only have thought that in this world probably it was the fate of everybody at some time to be made a public example of.

Then he realized that they were making a detour to the execution ground, so he must be going to have his head cut off, after all. He looked round him regretfully at the people swarming after him like ants, and unexpectedly in the crowd of people by the road he caught sight of Amah Wu. So that was why he had not seen her for so long: she had been working in town.

Ah Q suddenly became ashamed of his lack of spirit, because he had not sung any lines from an opera. His thoughts revolved like a whirlwind: *The Young Widow at Her Husband's Grave* was not heroic enough. The words of "I regret to have killed" in *The Battle of Dragon and Tiger* were too poor. *I'll thrash you with a steel mace* was still the best. But when he wanted to raise his hands, he remembered that they were bound together; so he did not sing *I'll thrash you* either.

"In twenty years I shall be another. . . ." In his agitation Ah Q uttered half a saying which he had picked up himself but never used before. The crowd's roar "Good! ! !" sounded like the growl of a wolf.

The cart moved steadily forward. During the shouting Ah Q's eyes turned in search of Amah Wu, but she did not seem to have seen him for she was looking raptly at the foreign rifles carried by the soldiers.

* "In twenty years I shall be another stout young fellow" was a phrase often used by criminals before execution, to show their scorn of death. Believing in the transmigration of the soul, they thought that after death their souls would enter other living bodies.

So Ah Q took another look at the shouting crowd.

At that instant his thoughts revolved again like a whirlwind. Four years before, at the foot of the mountain, he had met a hungry wolf which had followed him at a set distance, wanting to eat him. He had nearly died of fright, but luckily he happened to have an axe in his hand, which gave him the courage to get back to Weichuang. But he had never forgotten that wolf's eyes, fierce yet cowardly, gleaming like two will-o'-the-wisps, as if boring into him from a distance. And now he saw eyes more terrible even than the wolf's: dull yet penetrating eyes that seemed to have devoured his words and to be still eager to devour something beyond his flesh and blood. And these eyes kept following him at a set distance.

These eyes seemed to have merged in one, biting into his soul.

"Help, help!"

But Ah Q never uttered these words. All had turned black before his eyes, there was a buzzing in his ears, and he felt as if his whole body were being scattered like so much light dust.

As for the after-effects of the robbery, the most affected was the successful provincial candidate, because the stolen goods were never recovered. All his family lamented bitterly. Next came the Chao household; for when the successful county candidate went into town to report the robbery, not only did he have his pigtail cut off by bad revolutionaries, but he had to pay a reward of twenty thousand cash into the bargain; so all the Chao family too lamented bitterly. From that day forward they gradually assumed the air of survivors of a fallen dynasty.

As for any discussion of the event, no question was raised in Weichuang. Naturally all agreed that Ah Q had been a bad man, the proof being that he

had been shot; for if he had not been bad, how could he have been shot? But the census of opinion in town was unfavourable. Most people were dissatisfied, because a shooting was not such a fine spectacle as a decapitation; and what a ridiculous culprit that had been too, to have passed through so many streets without singing a single line from an opera. They had followed him for nothing.

December 1921

VILLAGE OPERA

During the past twenty years I have been to the Chinese opera only twice. During the first ten years I never went, having neither the desire nor the opportunity. The two occasions on which I went were in the past ten years, but each time I left without seeing anything in it.

The first time was in 1912 when I was new to Peking. A friend told me Peking had the best opera and that seeing it was an experience I shouldn't miss. I thought it might be interesting, especially in Peking, to see an opera, and hurried in high spirits to some theatre, the name of which I have forgotten. The performance had already started, and the beat of the drums could be heard outside. As we squeezed in, bright colours flashed in view, and I saw many heads in the auditorium; as I scanned the theatre I saw a few seats in the middle were still empty. But when I squeezed in to sit down, someone spoke up. There was such a throbbing in my ears that I had to listen attentively to catch what he was saying — "Sorry, these seats are taken!"

We went to the back, but then a man with a glossy queue led us to a side aisle, and indicated an unoccupied place. This was a bench only three-quarters the width of my thighs, but with legs nearly twice as long as mine. To begin with I hadn't the courage to get up there, and then it reminded me of some

instrument of torture, and with an involuntary shudder I fled.

I had gone some distance, when I heard my friend's voice, asking: "Well, what is it?" And looking over my shoulder I saw he had followed me out. He seemed very surprised. "Why do you march along without a word?" he demanded.

"I'm sorry," I told him. "There's such a pounding in my ears, I couldn't hear you."

Whenever I thought back on the incident, it struck me as very strange, and I supposed that the opera had been a very poor one — or else a theatre was no place for me.

I forget in what year I made the second venture, but funds were being raised for flood victims in Hupeh, and Tan Hsin-pei* was still alive. By paying two dollars for a ticket, you contributed money and could go to the Number One Theatre to see an opera with a cast made up for the most part of famous actors, one being Tan Hsin-pei himself. I bought a ticket primarily to satisfy the collector, but then some busy-body seized the opportunity to tell me why Tan Hsin-pei simply had to be seen. At that, I forgot the disastrous din and crash of a few years before, and went to the theatre — probably half because I had paid so much for that precious ticket that I wouldn't feel comfortable if I didn't use it. I learned that Tan Hsin-pei made his appearance late in the evening, and Number One Theatre was a modern one where you didn't have to fight for your seat. That reassured me, and I waited till nine o'clock before setting out. To my surprise, just as before, it was full. There was hardly any standing room and I had to squeeze into the crowd at the rear to watch an actor singing

* A famous actor in Peking opera.

an old woman's part. He had a paper spill burning at each corner of his mouth and there was a devil-soldier beside him. I racked my brains and guessed that this might be Maudgalyayana's* mother, because the next to come on was a monk. Not recognizing the actor, I asked a fat gentleman who was squeezed in at my left. "Kung Yun-fu!"** he said, throwing me a withering look from the corner of his eye. My face burned with shame for my ignorant blunder, and I mentally resolved that at all costs I would ask no more questions. Then I watched a heroine and her maid sing, next an old man and some other characters I couldn't identify. After that, I watched a whole group fight a free-for-all, and after that, two or three people fighting together—from after nine till ten, from ten till eleven, from eleven till eleven thirty, from eleven thirty till twelve: but there was no sign of Tan Hsin-pei.

Never in my life have I waited for anything so patiently. But the wheezes of the fat gentleman next to me, the clanging, tinkling, drumming and gonging on the stage, the whirl of bright colours and the lateness of the hour suddenly made me realize that this was no place for me. Mechanically I turned round, and tried with might and main to shove my way out. I felt the place behind me filled up at once—no doubt the elastic fat gentleman had expanded his right side into my empty place. With my retreat cut off, naturally there was nothing to do but push and push till at last I was out of the gate. Apart from the rickshaws waiting for the playgoers, there was practically no one walking outside, but there were still a

* Maudgalyayana was a disciple of Buddha. Legend has it that his mother went to hell for her sins, and he rescued her.

** Another famous actor in Peking opera, who played old women's roles.

dozen people by the gate looking up at the program, and another group not looking at anything, who must, I thought, be waiting to watch the women come out after the show was over. And no sign of Tan Hsin-pei. . . .

But the night air was so brisk, it went right through you. This seemed to be the first time I had known such good air in Peking.

I said goodbye to the Chinese opera that night. I never thought about it again, and if by any chance I passed a theatre it meant nothing to me, for in spirit we were poles apart.

A few days ago, however, I happened to read a Japanese book—unfortunately I have forgotten the title and author, but it was about the Chinese opera. One chapter made the point that the Chinese opera is so full of gongs and cymbals, shouting and jumping, that it makes the onlookers' heads swim. It is quite unsuited for presentation in a theatre but, if performed in the open air and watched from a distance, it has its charm. I felt this put into words what had remained unformulated in my mind, because as a matter of fact I did clearly remember seeing a really good opera in the country, and it was under its influence, perhaps, I twice went to the theatre after coming to Peking. It's a pity that, somehow or other, I've forgotten the name of that book.

As to when I saw that good opera, it was really "long, long ago," and I could not have been much more than eleven or twelve. It was the custom in Luchen where we lived for married women who were not yet in charge of the household to go back to their parents' home for the summer. Although my father's mother was then still quite strong, my mother had quite a few household duties. She could not spend many days at her own home during the summer. She

could take a few days only after visiting the ancestral graves. At such times I always went with her to stay in her parents' house. It was in a place called Ping-chiao Village, not far from the sea, a very out-of-the-way little village on a river, with less than thirty households, peasants and fishermen, and just one tiny grocery. In my eyes, however, it was heaven, for not only was I treated as a guest of honour, but I could skip reading the *Book of Songs*.*

There were many children for me to play with. For with the arrival of a visitor from such a distance they got permission from their parents to do less work so as to play with me. In a small village the guest of one family is virtually the guest of the whole community. We were all about the same age, but when it came to determining seniority, many were at least my uncles or grand-uncles, since everybody in the village had the same family name and belonged to one clan. But we were good friends, and if by some chance we had a falling out and I hit one of my grand-uncles, it never occurred to any child or grown-up in the village to call it "disrespect to elders." Ninety-nine out of a hundred of them could neither read nor write.

We spent most of our days digging up worms, putting them on little hooks made of copper wire, and lying on the river bank to catch shrimps. Shrimps are the silliest water creatures: they willingly use their own pincers to push the point of the hook into their mouths; so in a few hours we could catch a big bowlful. It became the custom to give these shrimps to me. Another thing we did was to take the buffaloes out together, but, maybe because they are animals of a higher species, oxen and buffaloes are hostile to

* The earliest anthology of poetry in China.

strangers, and they treated me with contempt so that I never dared get too close to them. I could only follow at a distance and stand there. At such times my small friends were no longer impressed by the fact that I could recite classical poetry, but would hoot with laughter.

What I looked forward to most was going to Chaochuang to see the opera. Chaochuang was a slightly larger village about two miles away. Since Pingchiao was too small to afford to put on operas, every year it contributed some money for a performance at Chaochuang. At the time, I wasn't curious why they should have operas every year. Thinking about it now, I dare say it may have been for the late spring festival or for the village sacrifice.

That year I was eleven or twelve, the long-awaited day arrived. But as ill luck would have it, there was no boat for hire that morning. Pingchiao Village had only one sailing boat, which left in the morning and came back in the evening. This was a large boat which it was out of the question to keep; and all the other boats were unsuitable because they were too small. Someone was sent round to the neighbouring villages to ask if they had boats, but no—they had all been hired already. My grandmother was very upset, blamed my cousins for not hiring one earlier, and began complaining. Mother tried to comfort her by saying the operas at Luchen were much better than in these little villages, and there were several every year, so there was no need to go today. But I was nearly in tears from disappointment, and mother did her best to impress on me that no matter what, I must not make a scene, because it would upset my grandmother; and I mustn't go with other people either, for then grandmother would be worried.

In a word, it had fallen through. After lunch, when all my friends had left and the opera had started, I imagined I could hear the sound of gongs and drums, and saw them, with my mind's eye, buying soya-bean milk in front of the stage.

I didn't catch shrimps that day, and didn't eat much either. Mother was very upset, but there was nothing she could do. By supper time grandmother realized how I felt, and said I was quite right to be angry, they had been too negligent, and never before had guests been treated so badly. After the meal, youngsters who had come back from the opera gathered round and gaily described it all for us. I was the only one silent; they all sighed and said how sorry they were for me. Suddenly one of the brightest, called Shuang-hsi, had an inspiration, and said: "A big boat — hasn't Eighth Grand-uncle's boat come back?" A dozen other boys picked up the idea in a flash, and at once started agitating to take the boat and go with me. I cheered up. But grandmother was nervous, thinking we were all children and undependable. And mother said that since the grown-ups all had to work the next day, it wouldn't be fair to ask them to go with us and stay up all night. While our fate hung in the balance, Shuang-hsi went to the root of the question and declared loudly: "I give my word it'll be all right! It's a big boat, Brother Hsun never jumps around, and we can all swim!"

It was true. There wasn't one boy in the dozen who wasn't a fish in water, and two or three of them were first-rate swimmers.

Grandmother and mother were convinced and did not raise any more objections. They both smiled, and we immediately rushed out.

My heavy heart suddenly became light, and I felt as though I were floating on air. When we got out-

side, in the moonlight I saw a boat with a white awning moored at the bridge. We jumped aboard, Shuang-hsi seized the front pole and Ah-fa the back one; the younger boys sat down with me in the middle of the boat, while the older ones went to the stern. By the time mother followed us out to say "Be careful!" we had already cast off. We pushed off from the bridge, floated back a few feet, then moved forward under the bridge. Two oars were set up, each manned by two boys who changed shifts every third of a mile. Chatter, laughter and shouts mingled with the lapping of the water against the bow of our boat; to our right and left, as we flew forward towards Chaochuang, were emerald green fields of beans and wheat.

Amidst the mist on the water, the scent of the beans, wheat and river weeds was wafted on to our faces, and the moonlight shone faintly through the mist. In the distance, grey undulating hills, like the backs of some leaping iron beasts, seemed to be racing past the stern of our boat; but still I felt our progress was slow. When the oarsmen had changed shifts four times, it was just possible to see the faint outline of Chaochuang, and catch the sound of singing. There were several lights too, which we guessed must be on the stage, unless they were fishermen's lights.

The music we heard was probably flutes. Eddying round and round and up and down, it soothed me and set me dreaming at the same time, till I felt as though I were about to drift far away with it through the night air heavy with the scent of beans and wheat and river weeds.

As we approached the lights, we found they were fishermen's lights after all, and I realized I hadn't been looking at Chaochuang at all. Directly ahead of us was a pine wood where I had played the year

before, and seen the broken stone horse that had fallen on its side, and a stone sheep couched in the grass. When we passed the wood, the boat rounded a bend into a cove, and Chaochuang was really before us.

Our eyes were drawn to the stage standing in a plot of empty ground by the river outside the village, hazy in the distant moonlight, barely distinguishable from its surroundings. It seemed that the fairyland I had seen in pictures had come alive here. The boat was moving faster now, and presently we could make out figures on the stage and a blaze of bright colours, and the river close to the stage was black with the boat awnings of people come to watch the play.

"There's no room near the stage, let's watch from a distance," suggested Ah-fa.

The boat had slowed down now, and soon we arrived. True enough, it was impossible to get close to the stage. We had to make our boat fast even further from the stage than the shrine opposite it. We did not regret it, though, for we did not want our boat with its white awning to mix with those common black boats; and there was no room for us anyway. . . .

While we were hastily mooring, there appeared on the stage a man with a long black beard who had four pennons fixed to his back. He was fighting a whole group of bare-armed men with a spear. Shuang-hsi told us this was a famous acrobat who could turn eighty-four somersaults, one after the other. He had counted for himself earlier in the day.

We all crowded to the bow to watch the fighting, but the acrobat didn't turn any somersaults. Some of the bare-armed men turned head over heels a few times, then trooped off. Then a girl came out, and sang in a long drawn-out voice. "There aren't many people in the evening," said Shuang-hsi, "and the

acrobat's taking it easy. Nobody wants to show his skill without an audience." That was common sense, because by then there really weren't many people left to watch. The country folk had work the next day, and couldn't stay up all night, so they had all gone to bed. Just a score or so of idlers from Chao-chuang and the villages around remained sprinkled about. The families of the local rich were still there in the boats with black awnings, but they weren't really interested in the opera. Most of them had gone to the foot of the stage to eat cakes, fruit or melon seeds. So it really amounted to no audience.

As a matter of fact, I wasn't keen on the somersaults. What I most wanted to see was a snake spirit swathed in white, its two hands clasping a wand-like snake's head on its head. My second choice was a leaping tiger dressed in yellow. But though I waited a long time, they didn't appear. The girl went in, but then a very old man acting the part of a young man came out at once. I was rather tired and asked Kuei-sheng to buy me some soya-bean milk. He came back in a little while to say: "There isn't any. The deaf man who sells it has gone. There was some in the daytime, I drank two bowls then. I'll go get you a dipperful of water to drink."

I didn't drink the water, but stuck it out as best I could. I can't say what I saw, but it seemed that the faces of the players were gradually becoming very strange, the features blurred as though they had melted into one flat surface. Most of the younger boys were yawning, while the older ones were chatting among themselves. It was only when a clown in a red shirt was fastened to a pillar on the stage, and a greybeard started horsewhipping him that we all roused ourselves to watch again, laughing. I really think it was the best scene of the evening.

But then the old woman came out. This was the character I most dreaded, especially when she sat down to sing. Now I saw by everybody's disappointment that they felt as I did. In the beginning, the old woman just walked to and fro singing, then she sat on a chair in the middle of the stage. I was really distressed, and Shuang-hsi and the others started swearing. I waited patiently until, after a long time, the old woman raised her hand, and I thought she was going to stand up. But despite my hopes she lowered her hand slowly to its original position, and went on singing just as before. Some of the boys in the boat couldn't help groaning, and the rest began yawning again. Finally Shuang-hsi couldn't stand it any longer. He said he was afraid the old woman would go on singing till dawn, and we had better leave. We all promptly agreed, and became as eager as when we had set out. Three or four boys ran to the stern, seized the poles to punt back several yards, and headed the boat around. Cursing the old singer, they set up the oars, and started back for the pine wood.

Judging from the position of the moon, we had not been watching very long, and once we left Chao-chuang the moonlight seemed unusually bright. When we turned back to see the lantern-lit stage, it looked just as it had when we came, hazy as a fairy pavilion, covered in a rosy mist. And once again the flutes piped melodiously in our ears. I thought the old woman must have finished, but couldn't very well suggest going back again to see.

Soon the pine wood was behind us. Our boat was moving rather fast, but there was such thick darkness all around you could tell it was very late. As they discussed the players, laughing and swearing, the rowers pulled faster on the oars. And this time the

plash of water against our bow was even more distinct. The boat seemed like a great white fish carrying a freight of children on its back through the foam. Some old fishermen who fished all night stopped their punts to cheer at the sight.

We were still about a third of a mile from Ping-chiao when our boat slowed down, and the oarsmen said they were tired after rowing so hard. And we'd had nothing to eat for hours. It was Kuei-sheng who had a brilliant idea this time. He said the *lohan* beans were ripe, and we had fuel on the boat—we could use a little to cook the beans. Everybody agreed, and we immediately headed towards the bank. The pitch-black fields were filled with succulent beans.

"Hey! Ah-fa! It's your family's over here, and Old Liu Yi's over there. Which shall we take?" Shuang-hsi had been the first to leap ashore, and was calling from the bank.

As we all jumped ashore too, Ah-fa said: "Wait a minute and I'll take a look." He walked up and down feeling the beans, then straightened up to say: "Take ours, they're much bigger." With a shout we scattered through the bean field of Ah-fa's family, each picking a big handful of beans and throwing them into the boat. Shuang-hsi thought that if we took any more and Ah-fa's mother found out, there would be trouble, so we all went to Old Liu Yi's field to pick another handful each.

Then a few of the older boys started rowing slowly again, while others lit a fire in the stern, and the younger boys and I shelled the beans. Soon they were cooked, and we let the boat drift while we gathered round and ate them with our fingers. When we had finished eating we went on again, washing the utensils and throwing the pods into the river, to destroy all traces. Shuang-hsi was uneasy because we had used

the salt and firewood on Eighth Grand-uncle's boat, and the old man was so sharp he would be sure to find out and scold us. But after some discussion we decided there was nothing to fear. If he did scold us we would ask him to return the pine branch he had taken the previous year from the river bank, and call him "Old Scabby" to his face.

"We're all back! How could anything have happened? Didn't I guarantee it would be all right!" Shuang-hsi's voice suddenly rang out from the bow.

Looking past him, I saw we were already at Ping-chiao, and someone was standing at the foot of the bridge—it was mother. It was to her that Shuang-hsi was calling. As I walked up to the bow the boat passed under the bridge, then stopped, and we all went ashore. Mother was rather annoyed, and asked how we could come back so late—it was after midnight. But she was soon in a good humour again, and smiled as she invited everybody to come back and have some puffed rice.

They told her we had all eaten something, and were sleepy, so they had better get to bed at once, and off we all went to our own homes.

I didn't get up till noon the next day, and there was no word of any trouble with Eighth Grand-uncle over the salt or firewood. In the afternoon we went to catch shrimps as usual.

"Shuang-hsi, you young rascals stole my beans yesterday! And you didn't pick them properly, you trampled down quite a few." I looked up and saw Old Liu Yi on a punt, coming back from selling beans. There was still a heap of left-over beans at the bottom of the punt.

"Yes. We were treating a visitor. We didn't mean to take yours to begin with," said Shuang-hsi. "Look! You've frightened away my shrimp!"

When the old man saw me, he stopped punting, and chuckled. "Treating a visitor? So you should." Then he asked me: "Was yesterday's opera good?"

"Yes." I nodded.

"Did you enjoy the beans?"

"Very much." I nodded again.

To my surprise, the old man was greatly pleased. He stuck up a thumb, and declared with satisfaction: "People from big towns who have studied really know what's good. I select my bean seeds one by one. Country folk can't tell good from bad, and say my beans aren't as good as other people's. I'll give some to your mother today for her to try. . . ." Then he punted off.

When mother called me home for supper, there was a large bowl of boiled beans on the table, which Old Liu Yi had brought for her and me to eat. I heard he had praised me highly to mother, saying, "He's so young, yet he knows what's what. He's sure to pass all the official examinations in future. Your fortune's as good as made." But when I ate the beans, they didn't taste as good as the ones we'd eaten the night before.

It's a fact, right up till now, I've really never eaten such good beans, or seen such a good opera, as I did that night.

October 1922

THE NEW YEAR'S SACRIFICE

New Year's Eve of the old calendar* seems after all more like the real New Year's Eve; for, to say nothing of the villages and towns, even in the air there is a feeling that New Year is coming. From the pale, lowering evening clouds issue frequent flashes of lightning, followed by a rumbling sound of firecrackers celebrating the departure of the Hearth God; while, nearer by, the firecrackers explode even more violently, and before the deafening report dies away the air is filled with a faint smell of powder. It was on such a night that I returned to my native place, Luchen. Although I call it my native place, I had had no home there for some time, so I had to put up temporarily with a certain Mr. Lu, the fourth son of his family. He is a member of our clan, and belongs to the generation before mine, so I ought to call him "Fourth Uncle." An old student of the imperial college** who went in for Neo-Confucianism, I found him very little changed in any way, simply slightly older, but without any moustache as yet. When we met, after exchanging a few polite remarks he said I was fatter, and after saying I was fatter immediately started a violent attack on the revolutionaries. I knew this was not meant personally, because

* The Chinese lunar calendar.

** The highest institute of learning in the Ching Dynasty.

the object of the attack was still Kang Yu-wei.* Nevertheless, conversation proved difficult, so that in a short time I found myself alone in the study.

The next day I got up very late, and after lunch went out to see some relatives and friends. The day after I did the same. None of them was greatly changed, simply slightly older; but every family was busy preparing for "the sacrifice." This is the great end-of-year ceremony in Luchen, when people reverently welcome the God of Fortune and solicit good fortune for the coming year. They kill chickens and geese and buy pork, scouring and scrubbing until all the women's arms turn red in the water, some of them still wearing twisted silver bracelets. After the meat is cooked some chopsticks are thrust into it at random, and this is called the "offering." It is set out at dawn when incense and candles are lit, and they reverently invite the God of Fortune to come and partake of the offering. Only men can be worshippers, and after the sacrifice they naturally continue to let off firecrackers as before. This happens every year, in every family, provided they can afford to buy the offering and firecrackers; and this year they naturally followed the old custom.

The day grew overcast and in the afternoon it actually started to snow, the biggest snow-flakes as large as plum blossom petals, fluttering about the sky; and this combined with the smoke and air of activity to make Luchen appear in a ferment. When I returned to my uncle's study the roof of the house was already white with snow and the room also appeared brighter, lighting up very clearly the great red stone rubbing of the character for Longevity hanging on

*A famous reformist who lived from 1858 to 1927 and advocated constitutional monarchy.

the wall, written by the Taoist saint Chen Tuan.* One of a pair of scrolls had fallen down and was lying loosely rolled up on the long table, but the other was still hanging there, bearing the words: "By understanding reason we achieve tranquillity of mind." Idly, I went to turn over the books on the table beneath the window, but all I could find was a pile of what looked like an incomplete set of *Kang Hsi's Dictionary*,** a volume of Chiang Yung's *Notes to Chu Hsi's Philosophical Writings* and a volume of *Commentaries on the Four Books****. At all events, I made up my mind to leave the next day.

Besides, the very thought of my meeting with Hsiang Lin's Wife the day before made me uncomfortable. It had happened in the afternoon. I had been visiting a friend in the eastern part of the town. As I came out I met her by the river, and seeing the way she fastened her eyes on me I knew very well she meant to speak to me. Of all the people I had seen this time at Luchen none had changed as much as she: her hair, which had been streaked with white five years before, was now completely white, quite unlike someone in her forties. Her face was fearfully thin and dark in its sallowness, and had moreover lost its former expression of sadness, looking as if carved out of wood. Only an occasional flicker of her eyes showed she was still a living creature. In one hand she carried a wicker basket, in which was a broken bowl, empty; in the other she held a bamboo pole longer than herself, split at the bottom: it was clear she had become a beggar.

* A hermit at the beginning of the tenth century.

** A Chinese dictionary compiled under the auspices of Emperor Kang Hsi who reigned from 1662 to 1722.

*** Confucian classics.

I stood still, waiting for her to come and ask for money.

"You have come back?" she asked me first.

"Yes."

"That is very good. You are a scholar, and have travelled too and seen a lot. I just want to ask you something." Her lustreless eyes suddenly gleamed.

I could never have guessed she would talk to me like this. I stood there taken by surprise.

"It is this." She drew two paces nearer, and whispered very confidentially: "After a person dies, does he turn into a ghost or not?"

I was seized with foreboding, seeing her fixing me with her eyes. A shiver ran down my spine and I felt more nervous than when an unexpected examination is sprung on one at school, and unfortunately the teacher stands by one's side. Personally, I had never given the least thought to the question of the existence of spirits; but in this emergency how should I answer her? Hesitating for a moment, I reflected: "It is the tradition here to believe in spirits, yet she, she seems to be sceptical—perhaps it would be better to say she hopes: hopes that there is immortality and yet hopes that there is not. Why increase the sufferings of the wretched? To give her something to look forward to, it would be better to say there is."

"There may be, I think," I told her hesitantly.

"Then, there must also be a Hell?"

"What, Hell?" Greatly startled, I could only try to evade the question. "Hell? According to reason there should be one too—but not necessarily. Who cares about it anyway? . . ."

"Then will all the people of one family who have died see each other again?"

"Well, as to whether they will see each other again or not. . . ." I realized now that I was still a com-

plete fool; all my hesitation and reflection had been unable to stand up to three questions. Immediately I lost confidence and wanted to say the exact opposite of what I had told her before. "In this case . . . as a matter of fact, I am not sure. . . . Actually, regarding the question of ghosts, I am not sure either."

In order to avoid further importunate questions, I walked off, and beat a hasty retreat to my uncle's house, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable. I thought to myself: "I am afraid my answer will prove dangerous to her. Probably it is just that when other people are celebrating she feels lonely by herself, but could there be any other reason? Could she have had some premonition? If there is any other reason, and something happens as a result, then, through my answer, I should be held responsible to a certain extent." Finally, however, I ended by laughing at myself, thinking that such a chance meeting could have no great significance, and yet I was taking it so to heart; no wonder certain educationalists called me a neurotic case. Moreover I had distinctly said, "I am not sure," contradicting my previous answer; so even if anything should happen, it would have nothing at all to do with me.

"I am not sure" is a most useful phrase.

Inexperienced and rash young men often take it upon themselves to solve people's problems for them or choose doctors for them, and if by any chance things turn out badly, they are probably held to blame; but by simply concluding with this phrase "I am not sure," one can free oneself of all responsibility. At this time I felt even more strongly the necessity for such a phrase, since even in speaking with a beggar woman there was no dispensing with it.

However, I continued to feel uncomfortable, and even after a night's rest my mind kept running on

this, as if I had a premonition of some untoward development. In that oppressive snowy weather, in the gloomy study, this discomfort kept increasing. It would be better to leave: I should go back to town the next day. The boiled shark's fins in the Fu Hsing Restaurant had cost a dollar for a large portion, and I wondered if this cheap and delicious dish had increased in price or not. Although the friends who had accompanied me in the old days had scattered, the shark's fins still had to be tasted, even if I was alone. At all events, I made up my mind to leave the next day.

After many experiences that things which I hoped would not happen and felt should not happen invariably did happen, I was desperately afraid this would prove another such case. And, indeed, strange things did begin to happen. Towards evening I heard talking—it sounded like a discussion—in the inner room; but soon the conversation ended, and all I heard was my uncle saying loudly as he walked out: "Not earlier nor later, but just at this time—sure sign of a bad character!"

I felt first astonished, then very uncomfortable, thinking these words must refer to me. I looked outside the door, but no one was there. I contained myself with difficulty till their servant came in before dinner to brew a pot of tea, when at last I had a chance to make some enquiries.

"With whom was Mr. Lu angry just now?" I asked.

"Why, still with Hsiang Lin's Wife," he replied briefly.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife? How was that?" I asked again.

"She's dead."

"Dead?" My heart suddenly missed a beat. I started, and probably changed colour too. But all this

time he did not raise his head, so he was probably quite unaware of how I felt. Then I controlled myself, and asked:

"When did she die?"

"When? Last night, or else today, I'm not sure."

"How did she die?"

"How did she die? Why, of poverty of course."

He answered placidly and, still without having raised his head to look at me, went out.

However, my agitation was only short-lived, for now that something I had felt imminent had already taken place, I no longer had to take refuge in my "I'm not sure," or the servant's expression "dying of poverty" for comfort. My heart already felt lighter. Only from time to time did there still seem to be something weighing on it. Dinner was served, and my uncle accompanied me solemnly. I wanted to ask about Hsiang Lin's Wife, but knew that although he had read, "Ghosts and spirits are properties of Nature,"* he had retained many superstitions, and on the eve of this sacrifice it was out of the question to mention anything like death or illness. In case of necessity one could use veiled allusions, but unfortunately I did not know how to, so although questions kept rising to the tip of my tongue, I had to bite them back. From his solemn expression I suddenly suspected that he looked on me as choosing not earlier nor later but just this time to come and trouble him, and that I was also a bad character; therefore to set his mind at rest I told him at once that I intended to leave Luchen the next day and go back to the city. He did not press me greatly to stay. So we quietly finished the meal.

* A Confucian saying. The Confucians took a relatively rational view of spirits.

In winter the days are short and, now that it was snowing, darkness already enveloped the whole town. Everybody was busy beneath the lamplight, but outside the windows was very quiet. Snow-flakes fell on the thickly piled snow, making one feel even more lonely. I sat by myself under the yellow gleam of the vegetable oil lamp and thought, "This poor woman, abandoned by people in the dust as a tiresome and worn-out toy, once left her own imprint in the dust, and those who enjoy life must have wondered at her for wishing to prolong her existence; but now at least she has been swept clear by eternity. Whether spirits exist or not I do not know; but in the present world when a meaningless existence ends, so that someone whom others are tired of seeing is no longer seen, it is just as well, both for the individual concerned and for others." I listened quietly to see if I could hear the snow falling outside the window, still pursuing this train of thought, until gradually I felt less ill at ease.

Yet fragments of her life, seen or heard before, now combined to form one whole.

She did not belong to Luchen. One year at the beginning of winter, when my uncle's family wanted to change their maidservant, Old Mrs. Wei, who acted as introducer, brought her in. Her hair was tied with white bands, she wore a black skirt, blue jacket and pale green bodice, and was about twenty-six, with a pale face but rosy cheeks. Old Mrs. Wei called her Hsiang Lin's Wife, and said that she was a neighbour of her mother's family, and because her husband was dead she wanted to come out to work. My uncle knitted his brows and my aunt immediately understood that he disapproved of her because she was a widow. She looked very suitable, though, with big

strong feet and hands, and a meek expression; and she had not said a word but showed every sign of being tractable and hard-working. So my aunt paid no attention to my uncle's frown, but kept her. During the period of probation she worked from morning till night, as if she found resting dull, and she was so strong that she could do a man's work; accordingly on the third day it was settled, and each month she was to be paid five hundred cash.

Everybody called her Hsiang Lin's Wife. They did not ask her her own name; but since she was introduced by someone from Wei Village who said she was a neighbour, presumably her name was also Wei. She was not very talkative, only answering when other people spoke to her, and her answers were brief. It was not until a dozen days or so had passed that they learned little by little that she still had a severe mother-in-law at home and a younger brother-in-law more than ten years old, who could cut wood. Her husband, who had been a woodcutter too, had died in the spring. He had been ten years younger than she.* This little was all that people learned from her.

The days passed quickly, but she worked as hard as ever; she would eat anything, and did not spare herself. Everybody agreed that the Lu family had found a very good maidservant, who really got through more work than a hard-working man. At the end of the year she swept, mopped, killed chickens and geese and sat up to boil the sacrificial meat, single-handed, so the family did not have to hire extra help. Nevertheless she, on her side, was satisfied; gradually the

* In old China it used to be common in country districts for young women to be married to boys of ten or eleven. The bride's labour could then be exploited by her husband's family.

trace of a smile appeared at the corner of her mouth, and her face became whiter and plumper.

New Year was scarcely over when she came back from washing rice by the river looking pale, and said that she had just seen in the distance a man wandering on the opposite bank who looked very like her husband's cousin, and probably he had come to look for her. My aunt, much alarmed, made detailed enquiries, but failed to get any further information. As soon as my uncle learned of it he frowned and said, "This is bad. She must have run away from her husband's family."

Before long this inference that she had run away was confirmed.

About a fortnight later, just as everybody was beginning to forget what had happened, Old Mrs. Wei suddenly called, bringing with her a woman in her thirties who, she said, was the maidservant's mother-in-law. Although the woman looked like a villager, she behaved with great self-possession and had a ready tongue in her head. After the usual polite remarks she apologized for coming to take her daughter-in-law home, saying there was a great deal to be done at the beginning of spring, and since there were only old people and children at home they were short-handed.

"Since it is her mother-in-law who wants her to go back, what is there to be said?" was my uncle's comment.

Thereupon her wages were reckoned up. They amounted to one thousand seven hundred and fifty cash, all of which she had left with her mistress without using a single coin; and now my aunt gave the entire amount to her mother-in-law. The latter also

took her clothes, thanked Mr. and Mrs. Lu and went out. By this time it was already noon.

"Oh, the rice! Didn't Hsiang Lin's Wife go to wash the rice?" my aunt exclaimed some time later. Probably she was rather hungry, so that she remembered lunch.

Thereupon everybody set about looking for the rice basket. My aunt went first to the kitchen, then to the hall, then to the bedroom; but not a trace of it was to be seen anywhere. My uncle went outside, but could not find it either; only when he went right up to the riverside did he see it, set down fair and square on the bank, with a bundle of vegetables at the side.

Some people there told him that a boat with a white awning had moored there in the morning, but since the awning covered the boat completely they did not know who was inside, and before this incident no one had paid any attention to it. But when Hsiang Lin's Wife came out to wash rice, two men looking like country people jumped off the boat just as she was kneeling down and seizing hold of her carried her on board. After several shouts and cries, Hsiang Lin's Wife became silent: they had probably stopped her mouth. Then two women walked up, one of them a stranger and the other Old Mrs. Wei. When the people who told this story tried to peep into the boat they could not see very clearly, but she seemed to be lying bound on the floor of the boat.

"Disgraceful! Still . . ." said my uncle.

That day my aunt cooked the midday meal herself, and my cousin Ah Niu lit the fire.

After lunch Old Mrs. Wei came again.

"Disgraceful!" said my uncle.

"What is the meaning of this? How dare you come here again!" My aunt, who was washing dishes,

started scolding as soon as she saw her. "You recommended her yourself, and then plotted to have her carried off, causing all this upstir. What will people think? Are you trying to make a laughing-stock of our family?"

"Aiya, I was really taken in! Now I have come specially to clear this business up. When she asked me to find her work, how was I to know that she had left home without her mother-in-law's consent? I am very sorry, Mr. Lu, Mrs. Lu. Because I am so old and foolish and careless, I have offended my patrons. However, it is lucky for me that your family is always so generous and kind, and unwilling to be hard on your inferiors. This time I promise to find you someone good to make up for my mistake."

"Still . . ." said my uncle.

Thereupon Hsiang Lin's Wife's business was concluded, and before long it was also forgotten.

Only my aunt, because the maidservants taken on afterwards were all lazy or fond of stealing food, or else both lazy and fond of stealing food, with not a good one in the lot, still often spoke of Hsiang Lin's Wife. On such occasions she would always say to herself, "I wonder what has become of her now?" meaning that she would like to have her back. But by the following New Year she too gave up hope.

The New Year's holiday was nearly over when Old Mrs. Wei, already half tipsy, came to pay her respects, and said it was because she had been back to the Wei Village to visit her mother's family and stayed a few days that she had come late. During the course of conversation they naturally came to speak of Hsiang Lin's Wife.

"She?" said Mrs. Wei cheerfully. "She is in luck now. When her mother-in-law dragged her home,

she had already promised her to the sixth son of the Ho family in Ho Village; so not long after she reached home they put her in the bridal chair and sent her off."

"Aiya! What a mother-in-law!" exclaimed my aunt in amazement.

"Ah, madam, you really talk like a great lady! We country folk, poor women, think nothing of that. She still had a younger brother-in-law who had to get married. And if they hadn't found her a husband, where would they have got the money for his wedding?* But her mother-in-law is a clever and capable woman, who knows how to drive a good bargain, so she married her off into the mountains. If she had married her to someone in the same village, she wouldn't have got so much money; but very few women are willing to marry someone living in the depth of the mountains, so that she got eighty thousand cash. Now the second son has got married, only costing her fifty thousand for the presents, and after paying the wedding expenses she has still over ten thousand left. Just think, doesn't this show she knows how to drive a good bargain? . . ."

"But was Hsiang Lin's Wife willing?"

"It wasn't a question of being willing or not. Of course anyone would have protested. But they just tied her up with a rope, stuffed her into the bridal chair, carried her to the man's house, put on the bridal head-dress, performed the ceremony in the hall and locked them into their room; and that was that. But Hsiang Lin's Wife is quite a character. I heard she really put up a great struggle, and everybody said it must be because she had worked in a scholar's family

* In old China, because of the labour value of the peasant woman, the man's family virtually bought the wife.

that she was different from other people. We go-betweens, madam, see a great deal. When widows remarry, some cry and shout, some threaten to commit suicide, some when they have been carried to the man's house won't go through the ceremony, and some even smash the wedding candlesticks. But Hsiang Lin's Wife was different from the rest. They said she shouted and cursed all the way, so that by the time they had carried her to Ho Village she was completely hoarse. When they dragged her out of the chair, although the two chair-bearers and her young brother-in-law used all their strength, they couldn't force her to go through the ceremony. The moment they were careless enough to loosen their grip—gracious Buddha!—she threw herself against a corner of the table and knocked a big hole in her head. The blood poured out, and although they used two handfuls of incense ashes and bandaged her with two pieces of red cloth, they still couldn't stop the bleeding. Finally it took all of them together to get her shut up with her husband in the bridal chamber, where she went on cursing. Oh, it was really dreadful!" She shook her head, cast down her eyes and said no more.

"And after that what happened?" asked my aunt.

"They said the next day she still didn't get up," said Old Mrs. Wei, raising her eyes.

"And after?"

"After? She got up. At the end of the year she had a baby, a boy, who was two this New Year.* These few days when I was at home some people went to Ho Village, and when they came back they said they had seen her and her son, and that both mother and

* It was the custom in China to reckon a child as one year old at birth, and to add another year to his age at New Year.

baby are fat. There is no mother-in-law over her, the man is a strong fellow who can earn a living, and the house is their own. Well, well, she is really in luck."

After this even my aunt gave up talking of Hsiang Lin's Wife.

But one autumn, two New Years after they heard how lucky Hsiang Lin's Wife had been, she actually reappeared at the threshold of my uncle's house. On the table she placed a round bulb-shaped basket, and under the eaves a small roll of bedding. Her hair was still wrapped in white bands, and she wore a black skirt, blue jacket and pale green bodice. But her face was sallow and her cheeks had lost their colour; she kept her eyes downcast, and her eyes, with their tear-stained rims, were no longer bright. Just as before, it was Old Mrs. Wei, looking very benevolent, who brought her in, and who explained at length to my aunt:

"It was really a bolt from the blue. Her husband was so strong nobody could have guessed that a young fellow like that would die of typhoid fever. First he seemed better, but then he ate a bowl of cold rice and the sickness came back. Luckily she had the boy, and she can work, whether it is chopping wood, picking tea-leaves or raising silkworms; so at first she was able to carry on. But then who could know that the child, too, would be carried off by a wolf? Although it was nearly the end of spring, still wolves came to the village—how could anyone have guessed that? Now she is all on her own. Her brother-in-law came to take the house, and turned her out; so she has really no way open to her but to come and ask help from her former mistress. Luckily this time there is nobody to stop her, and you happen to be wanting a new servant, so I have brought her here.

I think someone who is used to your ways is much better than a new hand. . . .”

“I was really stupid, really . . .” Hsiang Lin’s Wife raised her listless eyes to say. “I only knew that when it snows the wild beasts in the glen have nothing to eat and may come to the villages; I didn’t know that in spring they could come too. I got up at dawn and opened the door, filled a small basket with beans and called our Ah Mao to go and sit at the threshold and shell the beans. He was very obedient and always did as I told him: he went out. Then I chopped wood at the back of the house and washed the rice, and when the rice was in the pan and I wanted to boil the beans I called Ah Mao, but there was no answer; and when I went out to look, all I could see was beans scattered on the ground, but no Ah Mao. He never went to other families to play; and in fact at each place that I went to ask, there was no sign of him. I became desperate, and begged people to go to look for him. Only in the afternoon, after looking everywhere else, did they go to look in the glen and see one of his little shoes caught on a bramble. ‘That’s bad,’ they said, ‘he must have met a wolf.’ And sure enough when they went further in there he was, lying in the wolf’s lair, with all his entrails eaten away, his hand still tightly clutching that little basket. . . .” At this point she started crying, and was unable to complete the sentence.

My aunt had been undecided at first, but by the end of this story the rims of her eyes were rather red. After thinking for a moment she told her to take the round basket and bedding into the servants’ quarters. Old Mrs. Wei heaved a long sigh as if relieved of a great burden. Hsiang Lin’s Wife looked a little more at ease than when first she came and, without having to be told the way, quietly took away her bedding.

From this time on she worked again as a maidservant in Luchen.

Everybody still called her Hsiang Lin's Wife.

However, she had changed a great deal. She had not been there more than three days before her master and mistress realized that she was not as quick as before, her memory was much worse, and her impassive face never showed the least trace of a smile; thus my aunt already expressed herself very far from satisfied. When the woman first arrived, although my uncle frowned as before, still, they invariably had such difficulty in finding servants that he did not object very strongly, only secretly warned my aunt that while such people may seem very pitiful they exert a bad moral influence. Thus although it would be all right for her to do ordinary work she must not join in the preparations for sacrifice; they would have to prepare all the dishes themselves, for otherwise they would be unclean and the ancestors would not accept them.

The most important event in my uncle's household was ancestral sacrifice, and formerly this had been Hsiang Lin's Wife's busiest time; but now she had very little to do. When the table was placed in the centre of the hall and the curtain fastened, she still remembered how to set out the winecups and chopsticks in the old way.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife, put those down!" said my aunt hastily. "I'll do it!"

She sheepishly withdrew her hand and went to get the candlesticks.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife, put those down!" cried my aunt hastily again. "I'll fetch them."

After walking round several times without finding anything to do, she could only go hesitantly away.

All she did that day was to sit by the stove and feed the fire.

The people in the town still called her Hsiang Lin's Wife, but in a different tone from before; and although they talked to her still, their manner was colder. She did not mind this in the least, only, looking straight in front of her, she would tell everybody her story, which night or day was never out of her mind.

"I was really stupid, really," she would say. "I only knew that when it snows the wild beasts in the glen have nothing to eat and may come to the villages; I didn't know that in spring they could come too. I got up at dawn and opened the door, filled a small basket with beans and called our Ah Mao to go and sit at the threshold and shell them. He was very obedient and always did as I told him: he went out. Then I chopped wood at the back of the house and washed the rice, and when the rice was in the pan and I wanted to boil the beans I called Ah Mao, but there was no answer; and when I went out to look, all I could see was beans scattered on the ground, but no Ah Mao. He never went to other families to play; and in fact at each place that I went to ask, there was no sign of him. I became desperate, and begged people to go to look for him. Only in the afternoon, after looking everywhere else, did they go to look in the glen and see one of his little shoes caught on a bramble. 'That's bad,' they said, 'he must have met a wolf.' And sure enough when they went further in there he was, lying in the wolf's lair, with all his entrails eaten away, his hand still tightly clutching that small basket. . . ." At this point she would start crying and her voice would trail away.

This story was rather effective, and when men heard it they often stopped smiling and walked away disconcerted, while the women not only seemed to for-

give her but their faces immediately lost their contemptuous look and they added their tears to hers. There were some old women who had not heard her speaking in the street, who went specially to look for her, to hear her sad tale. When her voice trailed away and she started to cry, they joined in, shedding the tears which had gathered in their eyes. Then they sighed, and went away satisfied, exchanging comments.

She asked nothing better than to tell her sad story over and over again, often gathering three or four hearers. But before long everybody knew it by heart, until even in the eyes of the most kindly, Buddha-fearing old ladies not a trace of tears could be seen. In the end, almost everyone in the town could recite her tale, and it bored and exasperated them to hear it.

"I was really stupid, really . . ." she would begin.

"Yes, you only knew that in snowy weather the wild beasts in the mountains had nothing to eat and might come down to the villages." Promptly cutting short her recital, they walked away.

She would stand there open-mouthed, looking at them with a dazed expression, and then go away too, as if she also felt disconcerted. But she still brooded over it, hoping from other topics such as small baskets, beans and other people's children, to lead up to the story of her Ah Mao. If she saw a child of two or three, she would say, "Oh dear, if my Ah Mao were still alive, he would be just so big. . . ."

Children seeing the look in her eyes would take fright and, clutching the hems of their mothers' clothes, try to tug them away. Thereupon she would be left by herself again, and finally walk away disconcerted. Later everybody knew what she was like, and it only needed a child present for them to ask her with an artificial smile, "Hsiang Lin's Wife, if your

Ah Mao were alive, wouldn't he be just as big as that?"

She probably did not realize that her story, after having been turned over and tasted by people for so many days, had long since become stale, only exciting disgust and contempt; but from the way people smiled she seemed to know that they were cold and sarcastic, and that there was no need for her to say any more. She would simply look at them, not answering a word.

In Luchen people celebrate New Year in a big way: from the twentieth day of the twelfth month onwards preparations start. This time my uncle's household found it necessary to hire a temporary manservant, but since there was still a great deal to do they also called in another maidservant, Liu Ma, to help. Chickens and geese had to be killed; but Liu Ma was a devout woman who abstained from meat, did not kill living things, and would only wash the sacrificial dishes. Hsiang Lin's Wife had nothing to do but feed the fire. She sat there, resting, watching Liu Ma as she washed the sacrificial dishes. A light snow began to fall.

"Dear me, I was really stupid," said Hsiang Lin's Wife, as if to herself, looking at the sky and sighing.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife, there you go again," said Liu Ma, looking at her impatiently. "I ask you: that wound on your forehead, wasn't it then you got it?"

"Uh, huh," she answered vaguely.

"Let me ask you: what made you willing after all?"

"Me?"

"Yes. What I think is, you must have been willing; otherwise. . . ."

"Oh dear, you don't know how strong he was."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe he was so strong that you really couldn't keep him off. You must have been willing, only you put the blame on his being so strong."

"Oh dear, you . . . you try for yourself and see."
She smiled.

Liu Ma's lined face broke into a smile too, making it wrinkled like a walnut; her small beady eyes swept Hsiang Lin's Wife's forehead and fastened on her eyes. As if rather embarrassed, Hsiang Lin's Wife immediately stopped smiling, averted her eyes and looked at the snow-flakes.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife, that was really a bad bargain," said Liu Ma mysteriously. "If you had held out longer or knocked yourself to death, it would have been better. As it is, after living with your second husband for less than two years, you are guilty of a great crime. Just think: when you go down to the lower world in future, these two men's ghosts will still fight over you. To which will you go? The King of Hell will have no choice but to cut you in two and divide you between them. I think, really. . . ."

Then terror showed in her face. This was something she had never heard in the mountains.

"I think you had better take precautions beforehand. Go to the Tutelary God's Temple and buy a threshold to be your substitute, so that thousands of people can walk over it and trample on it, in order to atone for your sins in this life and avoid torment after death."

At the time Hsiang Lin's Wife said nothing, but she must have taken this to heart, for the next morning when she got up there were dark circles beneath her eyes. And after breakfast she went to the Tutelary God's Temple at the west end of the village, and asked to buy a threshold. The temple priests would not agree at first, and only when she shed tears did they give a grudging consent. The price was twelve thousand cash.

She had long since given up talking to people, because Ah Mao's story had been received with such

contempt; but news of her conversation with Liu Ma that day spread, and many people took a fresh interest in her and came again to tease her into talking. As for the subject, that had naturally changed to deal with the wound on her forehead.

"Hsiang Lin's Wife, I ask you: what made you willing after all that time?" one would cry.

"Oh, what a pity, to have had this knock for nothing," another looking at her scar would agree.

Probably she knew from their smiles and tone of voice that they were making fun of her, for she always looked steadily at them without saying a word, and finally did not even turn her head. All day long she kept her lips tightly closed, bearing on her head the scar which everyone considered a mark of shame, silently shopping, sweeping the floor, washing vegetables, preparing rice. Only after nearly a year did she take from my aunt her wages which had been accumulating, which she changed for twelve silver dollars, and asking for leave she went to the west end of the town. But in less time than it takes for a meal she was back again, looking much comforted, and with an unaccustomed light in her eyes; and she told my aunt happily that she had bought a threshold in the Tutelary God's Temple.

When the time came for the ancestral sacrifice at the winter equinox, she worked harder than ever, and seeing my aunt take out the sacrificial utensils and carry the table with Ah Niu into the middle of the hall, she went confidently to fetch the winecups and chopsticks.

"Put those down, Hsiang Lin's Wife!" my aunt called out hastily.

She withdrew her hand as if scorched, her face turned ashen-grey, and instead of fetching the candle-

sticks she just stood there dazed. Only when my uncle came to burn incense and told her to go, did she walk away. This time the change in her was very great, for the next day not only were her eyes sunken, but even her spirit seemed broken. Moreover she became very timid, not only afraid of the dark and shadows, but also of the sight of anyone. Even her own master or mistress made her look as frightened as a little mouse that has come out of its hole in the daytime. For the rest, she would sit stupidly, like a wooden statue. In less than half a year her hair began to turn grey, and her memory became much worse, reaching a point when she was constantly forgetting to go and prepare the rice.

"What has come over Hsiang Lin's Wife? It would really have been better not to have kept her that time." My aunt would sometimes speak like this in front of her, as if to warn her.

However, she remained this way, so that it was impossible to see any hope of her improving. Then they decided to get rid of her and tell her to go back to Old Mrs. Wei. While I was at Luchen they were still only talking of this; but judging by what happened later, it is evident that this was what they must have done. But whether after leaving my uncle's household she became a beggar, or whether she went first to Old Mrs. Wei's house and later became a beggar, I do not know.

I was woken up by firecrackers exploding noisily close at hand, saw the glow of the yellow oil lamp as large as a bean, and heard the splutter of fireworks as my uncle's household celebrated the sacrifice. I knew that it was nearly dawn. I felt bewildered, hearing as in a dream the confused continuous sound of distant crackers which seemed to form one dense cloud

of noise in the sky, joining with the whirling snowflakes to envelop the whole town. Enveloped in this medley of sound, relaxed and at ease, the doubt which had preyed on me from dawn to early night was swept clean away by the atmosphere of celebration, and I felt only that the saints of heaven and earth had accepted the sacrifice and incense and were all reeling with intoxication in the sky, preparing to give the people of Luchen boundless good fortune.

February 7, 1924

IN THE WINE SHOP

During my travels from the North to the South-east I made a detour to my home, then to S—. This town is only about ten miles from my native place, and can be reached in less than half a day by a small boat. I had taught in a school here for a year. In the depth of winter, after snow, the landscape was chilly. Indolence and nostalgia combined finally made me put up for a short time in the Lo Szu Inn, one which had not been there before. The town was small. I looked for several old colleagues I thought I might find, but not one was there: they had long since gone their different ways. And when I passed the gate of the school, that too had changed its name and appearance, making me feel quite a stranger. In less than two hours my enthusiasm had waned, and I rather reproached myself for coming.

The inn in which I stayed let rooms but did not supply meals; rice and dishes could be ordered from outside, but they were quite unpalatable, tasting like mud. Outside the window was only a stained and spotted wall, covered with withered moss. Above was the slaty sky, dead white without any colouring; moreover a light flurry of snow had begun to fall. I had had a poor lunch to begin with, and had nothing to do to while away the time, so quite naturally I thought of a small wine shop I had known very well in the old days, called "One Barrel House," which, I reckoned, could not be far from the hotel. I immediately locked

the door of my room and set out for this tavern. Actually, all I wanted was to escape the boredom of my stay. I did not really want to drink. "One Barrel House" was still there, its narrow, mouldering front and dilapidated signboard unchanged. But from the landlord down to the waiter there was not a single person I knew—in "One Barrel House" too I had become a complete stranger. Still I walked up the familiar flight of stairs in the corner of the room to the little upper storey. Up here were the same five small wooden tables, unchanged. Only the back window, which had originally had a wooden lattice, had been fitted with glass panes.

"A catty of yellow wine. Dishes? Ten slices of fried beancurd, with plenty of pepper sauce!"

As I gave the order to the waiter who had come up with me, I walked to the back and sat down at the table by the window. This upstairs room was absolutely empty, enabling me to take possession of the best seat from which one could look out on to the deserted courtyard beneath. The courtyard probably did not belong to the wine shop. I had looked out at it many times before in the past, sometimes too in snowy weather. But now, to eyes accustomed to the North, the sight was sufficiently striking: several old plum trees were actually in full blossom to rival the snow, as if entirely oblivious of winter; while beside the crumbling pavilion there was still a camellia with a dozen crimson blossoms standing out against its thick, dark green foliage, blazing in the snow as bright as fire, indignant and arrogant, as if despising the wanderer's wanderlust. And I suddenly remembered the moistness of the heaped snow here, clinging, glistening and shining, quite unlike the dry northern snow which, when a high wind blows, will fly up and fill the sky like mist. . . .

"Your wine, sir . . ." said the waiter carelessly, and put down the cup, chopsticks, wine pot and dish. The wine had come. I turned to the table, set everything straight and filled my cup. I felt that the North was certainly not my home, yet when I came South I could only count as a stranger. The dry snow up there, which flew like powder, and the soft snow here, which clung lingeringly, seemed equally alien to me. In a slightly melancholy mood, I took a leisurely sip of wine. The wine was quite pure, and the fried bean-curd was excellently cooked. The only pity was that the pepper sauce was too thin, but then the people of S— had never understood pungent flavours.

Probably because it was only afternoon, the place had none of the atmosphere of a tavern. I had already drunk three cups, but apart from myself there were still only four bare wooden tables in the place. Looking at the deserted courtyard I began to feel lonely, yet I did not want any other customers to come up. Thus I could not help being irritated by the occasional sound of footsteps on the stairs, and was relieved to find it was only the waiter. And so I drank another two cups of wine.

"This time it must be a customer," I thought, for the footsteps sounded much slower than those of the waiter. When I judged that he must be at the top of the stairs, I raised my head rather apprehensively to look at this unwelcome company. Then I gave a start and stood up. Never could I have guessed that here of all places I should unexpectedly meet a friend—if such he would still let me call him. The newcomer was an old classmate who had been my colleague when I was a teacher, and although he had changed a great deal I knew him as soon as I saw him. Only he had become much slower in his movements, very unlike the nimble and active Lu Wei-fu of the old days.

"Ah, Wei-fu, is it you? I never expected to meet you here."

"Oh, it's you? Neither did I ever. . . ."

I urged him to join me, but only after some hesitation did he seem willing to sit down. At first I thought this very strange, and felt rather hurt and displeased. When one looked closely at him he had still the same disorderly hair and beard and pale oblong face, but he was thinner and weaker. He looked very quiet, or perhaps dispirited, and his eyes beneath their thick black brows had lost their alertness; but when he looked slowly around in the direction of the deserted courtyard he suddenly flashed out one of those piercing looks which I had seen so often at school.

"Well," I said cheerfully but somewhat awkwardly, "we have not seen each other now for about ten years. I heard long ago that you were at Tsinan, but I was so wretchedly lazy I never wrote. . . ."

"I was just the same. I have been at Taiyuan for more than two years now, with my mother. When I came back to fetch her I learned that you had already left, left for good and all."

"What are you doing at Taiyuan?" I asked.

"Teaching in the family of a fellow-provincial."

"And before that?"

"Before that?" He took a cigarette from his pocket, lit it and put it in his mouth, then, watching the smoke he puffed out, said reflectively, "Simply futile work, equivalent to doing nothing at all."

He also asked what had happened to me since we separated. I gave him a rough idea, at the same time calling the waiter to bring a cup and chopsticks, so that he could share my wine while we had another two catties heated. We also ordered dishes. In the past we had never stood on ceremony, but now we began to be so formal that neither would choose a dish,

and finally we fixed on four suggested by the waiter: peas spiced with aniseed, cold meat, fried beancurd, and salted fish.

"As soon as I came back I knew I was a fool." Holding his cigarette in one hand and the winecup in the other, he spoke with a bitter smile. "When I was young, I saw the way bees or flies stopped in one place. If they were frightened they would fly off, but after flying in a small circle they would come back again to stop in the same place; and I thought this really very foolish, as well as pathetic. But I didn't think that I would have flown back too myself, after only flying in a small circle. And I didn't think you would have come back either. Couldn't you have flown a little further?"

"That's difficult to say. Probably I too have simply flown in a small circle." I also spoke with a rather bitter smile. "But why did you fly back?"

"For something quite futile." In one gulp he emptied his cup, then took several pulls at his cigarette, and opened his eyes a little wider. "Futile—but you may as well hear about it."

The waiter brought up the freshly heated wine and dishes, and set them on the table. The smoke and the fragrance of fried beancurd seemed to make the upstairs room more cheerful, while outside the snow fell still more thickly.

"Perhaps you knew," he went on, "that I had a little brother who died when he was three, and was buried in the country here. I can't even remember clearly what he looked like, but I have heard my mother say he was a very lovable child, and very fond of me. Even now it brings tears to her eyes to speak of him. This spring an elder cousin wrote to tell us that the ground beside his grave was gradually being swamped, and he was afraid before long it would slip

into the river: we should go at once and do something about it. As soon as my mother knew this, she became very upset, and couldn't sleep for several nights—she can read letters by herself, you know. But what could I do? I had no money, no time: there was nothing that could be done.

"Only now, by taking advantage of my New Year's holiday, have I been able to come South to move his grave." He drained another cup of wine, looked out of the window and exclaimed: "Could you find anything like this up North? Flowers in thick snow, and beneath the snow not frozen. So the day before yesterday I bought a small coffin, because I reckoned that the one under the ground must have rotted long ago—I took cotton and bedding, hired four workmen, and went into the country to move his grave. At the time I suddenly felt very happy, eager to dig up the grave, eager to see the body of the little brother who had been so fond of me: this was a new sensation for me. When we reached the grave, sure enough, the river water was encroaching on it and was already less than two feet away. The poor grave had not had any earth added to it for two years, and had sunk in. I stood in the snow, firmly pointed it out to the workmen, and said: 'Dig it up!'

"I really am a commonplace fellow. I felt that my voice at this juncture was rather unnatural, and that this order was the greatest I had given in all my life. But the workmen didn't find it at all strange, and simply set to work to dig. When they had reached the enclosure I had a look, and indeed the wood of the coffin had rotted almost completely away, leaving only a heap of splinters and small fragments of wood. My heart beat faster and I set these aside myself very carefully, wanting to see my little brother. However, I was taken by surprise. Bedding, clothes, skeleton,

all had gone! I thought: "These have all rotted away, but I always heard that the most difficult substance to rot is hair; perhaps there is still some hair." So I bent down and looked carefully in the mud where the pillow should have been, but there was none. Not a trace remained."

I suddenly noticed that the rims of his eyes had become rather red, but realized at once that this was the effect of the wine. He had scarcely touched the dishes, but had been drinking incessantly, so that he had already drunk more than a catty, and his looks and gestures had all become more vigorous, gradually resembling the Lu Wei-fu I had known. I called the waiter to heat two more measures of wine, then turned back and, taking my winecup, face to face with him, listened in silence to what he had to tell.

"Actually it need not really have been moved again; I had only to level the ground, sell the coffin, and that would have been the end of it. Although there would have been something rather singular in my going to sell the coffin, still, if the price were low enough the shop from which I bought it would have taken it, and at least I could have saved a little money for wine. But I didn't do so. I still spread out the bedding, wrapped up in cotton some of the clay where his body had been, covered it up, put it in the new coffin, moved it to the grave where my father was buried, and buried it beside him. And because I used bricks for an enclosure of the coffin I was busy again most of yesterday, supervising the work. But in this way I can count the affair ended, at least enough to deceive my mother and set her mind at rest. Well, well, you look at me like that! Are you blaming me for being too changed? Yes, I still remember the time when we went together to the Tutelary God's Temple to pull off the images' beards, how all day long we used to discuss methods

of revolutionizing China until we even came to blows. But now I am like this, willing to let things slide and to compromise. Sometimes I think: 'If my old friends were to see me now, probably they would no longer acknowledge me as a friend.' But this is what I am like now."

He took out another cigarette, put it in his mouth and lit it.

"Judging by your expression, you still seem to have hope for me. Naturally I am much more obtuse than before, but there are still some things I realize. This makes me grateful to you, at the same time rather uneasy. I am afraid I am only letting down the old friends who even now still have some hope for me. . . ." He stopped and puffed several times at his cigarette before going on slowly: "Only today, just before coming to this 'One Barrel House,' I did something futile, and yet it was something I was glad to do. My former neighbour on the east side was called Chang Fu. He was a boatman and had a daughter called Ah Shun. When you came to my house in those days you might have seen her, but you certainly wouldn't have paid any attention to her, because she was so small then. Nor did she grow up to be pretty, having just an ordinary thin oval face and pale skin. Only her eyes were unusually large, with very long lashes, and the whites were as clear as a cloudless night sky—I mean the cloudless sky of the North when there is no wind; here it is not so clear. She was very capable. She lost her mother when she was in her teens, and it was her job to look after a small brother and sister; also she had to wait on her father, and all this she did very competently. She was economical too, so that the family gradually grew better off. There was scarcely a neighbour who did not praise her, and even Chang Fu often expressed his appreciation. When

I was leaving on my journey this time, my mother remembered her—old people's memories are so long. She recalled that in the past Ah Shun saw someone wearing red artificial flowers in her hair, and wanted a spray for herself. When she couldn't get one she cried nearly all night, so that she was beaten by her father, and her eyes remained red and swollen for two or three days. These red flowers came from another province, and couldn't be bought even in S—, so how could she ever hope to have any? Since I was coming South this time, my mother told me to buy two sprays to give her.

"Far from feeling vexed at this commission, I was actually delighted. For I was really glad to do something for Ah Shun. The year before last, I came back to fetch my mother, and one day when Chang Fu was at home I happened to start chatting with him. He wanted to invite me to take a bowl of gruel made of buckwheat flour, telling me that they added white sugar to it. You see, a boatman who could keep white sugar in his house was obviously not poor, and must eat very well. I let myself be persuaded and accepted, but begged that they would only give me a small bowl. He quite understood, and said to Ah Shun: 'These scholars have no appetite. You can use a small bowl, but add more sugar!' However when she had prepared the concoction and brought it in, I gave a start, for it was a large bowl, as much as I would eat in a whole day. Compared with Chang Fu's bowl, it is true, it did appear small. In all my life I had never eaten this buckwheat gruel, and now that I tasted it, it was really unpalatable, though extremely sweet. I carelessly swallowed a few mouthfuls, and had decided not to eat any more when I happened to catch a glimpse of Ah Shun standing far off in one corner of the room. Then I hadn't the heart to put down my chopsticks.

I saw in her face both hope and fear—fear, no doubt, that she had prepared it badly, and hope that we would find it to our liking. I knew that if I left most of my bowl she would feel very disappointed and apologetic. So I screwed up my courage, opened wide my mouth and shovelled it down, eating almost as fast as Chang Fu. It was then that I learned the agony of forcing oneself to eat; I remember when I was a child and had to finish a bowl of brown sugar mixed with medicine for worms I experienced the same difficulty. I felt no resentment, though, because her half suppressed smile of satisfaction, when she came to take away our empty bowls, repaid me amply for all my discomfort. So that night, although indigestion kept me from sleeping well and I had a series of nightmares, I still wished her a lifetime of happiness, and hoped the world would change for the better for her sake. But such thoughts were only the traces of my dreams in the old days. The next instant I laughed at myself, and promptly forgot them.

“I had not known before that she had been beaten on account of a spray of artificial flowers, but when my mother spoke of it I remembered the buckwheat gruel incident, and became unaccountably diligent. First I made a search in Taiyuan, but none of the shops had them. It was only when I went to Tsinan. . . .”

There was a rustle outside the window, as a pile of snow slipped down from the camellia which it had been bending beneath its weight; then the branches of the tree straightened themselves, showing even more clearly their dark thick foliage and blood-red flowers. The colour of the sky became more slaty. Small sparrows chirped, probably because evening was near, and since the ground was covered with snow

they could find nothing to eat and went early to their nests to sleep.

"It was only when I went to Tsinan," he looked out of the window for a moment, turned back and drained a cup of wine, took several puffs at his cigarette, and went on, "only then did I buy the artificial flowers. I didn't know whether those she had been beaten for were this kind or not; but at least these were also made of velvet. I didn't know either whether she liked a deep or a light colour, so I bought one spray of red, one spray of pink, and brought them both here.

"Just this afternoon, as soon as I had finished lunch, I went to see Chang Fu, having specially stayed an extra day for this. His house was there all right, only looking rather gloomy; or perhaps that was simply my imagination. His son and second daughter—Ah Chao—were standing at the gate. Both of them had grown. Ah Chao was quite different from her sister, and looked very plain; but when she saw me come up to their house, she ran quickly inside. When I asked the little boy, I found that Chang Fu was not at home. 'And your elder sister?' At once he stared at me wide-eyed, and asked me what I wanted her for; moreover he seemed very fierce, as if he wanted to attack me. Hesitantly I walked away. Nowadays I just let things slide. . . .

"You can have no idea how much more afraid I am of calling on people than I used to be. Because I know very well how unwelcome I am, I have even come to dislike myself and, knowing this, why should I inflict myself on others? But this time I felt my errand had to be carried out, so after some reflection I went back to the firewood shop almost opposite their house. The shopkeeper's mother, Old Mrs. Fa, was there at least, and still recognized me. She actually asked me into the shop to sit down. After an ex-

change of polite remarks I told her why I had come back to S— and was looking for Chang Fu. I was taken aback when she heaved a sigh and said:

“‘What a pity Ah Shun had not the good luck to wear these flowers you have brought.’

“Then she told me the whole story, saying, ‘It was probably last spring that Ah Shun began to look pale and thin. Later she would often start crying suddenly, and if you asked her why, she wouldn’t say. Sometimes she even cried all night, crying until Chang Fu couldn’t help losing his temper and scolding her, saying she had waited too long to marry and had gone mad. But when autumn came, first she had a slight cold and then she took to her bed, and after that she never got up again. Only a few days before she died, she told Chang Fu that she had long ago become like her mother, often spitting blood and perspiring at night. But she had hidden it, afraid that he would worry over her. One evening her uncle Chang Keng came to demand money—he was always doing that—and when she would not give him any he smiled coldly and said, “Don’t be so proud; your man is not even up to me!” That upset her, but she was too shy to ask, and could only cry. As soon as Chang Fu knew this, he told her what a decent fellow her future husband was; but it was too late. Besides, she didn’t believe him. “It’s a good thing I’m already like this,” she said. “Now nothing matters any more.”’

“The old woman also said, ‘If her man was really not as good as Chang Keng, that would be truly frightful! He would not be up to a chicken thief, and what sort of fellow would that be! But when he came to the funeral I saw him with my own eyes: his clothes were clean and he was very presentable. And he said with tears in his eyes that he had worked hard all those years on the boat to save up money to marry, but now

the girl was dead. Obviously he must really have been a good man, and everything Chang Keng said was false. It was only a pity Ah Shun believed such a rascally liar, and died for nothing. But we can't blame anyone else: this was Ah Shun's fate.'

"Since that was the case, my business was finished too. But what about the two sprays of artificial flowers I had brought with me? Well, I asked her to give them to Ah Chao. This Ah Chao no sooner saw me than she fled as if I were a wolf or some monster; I really didn't want to give them to her. However, I did give them to her, and I have only to tell my mother that Ah Shun was delighted with them, and that will be that.' Who cares about such futile affairs anyway? One only wants to muddle through them somehow. When I have muddled through New Year I shall go back to teaching the Confucian classics as before."

"Are you teaching that?" I asked in astonishment.

"Of course. Did you think I was teaching English? First I had two pupils, one studying the *Book of Songs*, the other *Mencius*. Recently I have got another, a girl, who is studying the *Canon for Girls*.* I don't even teach mathematics; not that I wouldn't teach it, but they don't want it taught."

"I could really never have guessed that you would be teaching such books."

"Their father wants them to study these. I'm an outsider, so it's all the same to me. Who cares about such futile affairs anyway? There's no need to take them seriously."

His whole face was scarlet as if he were quite drunk, but the gleam in his eyes had died down. I gave a

* A book giving the feudal standard of behaviour for girls, and the virtues they should cultivate.

slight sigh, and for a time found nothing to say. There was a clatter on the stairs as several customers came up. The first was short, with a round bloated face; the second was tall with a conspicuous, red nose. Behind them were others, and as they walked up the small upper floor shook. I turned to Lu Wei-fu, who was trying to catch my eye; then I called the waiter to bring the bill.

"Is your salary enough to live on?" I asked as I prepared to leave.

"I have twenty dollars a month, not quite enough to manage on."

"Then what do you mean to do in future?"

"In future? I don't know. Just think: Has any single thing turned out as we hoped of all we planned in the past? I'm not sure of anything now, not even of what I will do tomorrow, nor even of the next minute. . . ."

The waiter brought up the bill and gave it to me. Wei-fu did not behave so formally as before, just glanced at me, then went on smoking and allowed me to pay.

We went out of the wine shop together. His hotel lay in the opposite direction from mine, so we said goodbye at the door. As I walked alone towards my hotel, the cold wind and snow beat against my face, but I felt refreshed. I saw that the sky was already dark, woven together with houses and streets into the white, shifting web of thick snow.

February 16, 1924

A HAPPY FAMILY

After the style of Hsu Ching-wen*

"... One writes simply as one feels: such a work is like sunlight, radiating from a source of infinite brightness, not like a spark from a flint struck on iron or stone. This alone is true art. And such a writer alone is a true artist. . . . But I . . . what do I rank as?"

Having thought so far he suddenly jumped out of bed. It had occurred to him that he must make some money by writing to support his family, and he had already decided to send his manuscripts to the *Happy Monthly* publishers, because the remuneration appeared to be comparatively generous. But in that case the choice of subjects would be limited, otherwise the work would probably not be accepted. All right let it be limited. What were the chief problems occupying the minds of the younger generation? . . . Undoubtedly there must be not a few, perhaps a great many, concerning love, marriage, the family. . . . Yes, there were certainly many people perplexed by such questions, even now discussing them. In that case, write about the family! But how to write? . . . Otherwise it would probably not be accepted. Why predict anything unlucky? Still. . . .

Jumping out of bed, in four or five steps he reached

* A novelist contemporary with Lu Hsun. The author declared that he modelled this story on Hsu's "An Ideal Companion."

the desk, sat down, took out a piece of paper with green lines, and promptly yet resignedly wrote the title: A Happy Family.

His pen immediately came to a standstill. He raised his head, his two eyes fixed on the ceiling, trying to decide on an environment for this Happy Family.

"Peking?" he thought. "That won't do; it's too dead, even the atmosphere is dead. Even if a high wall were built round this family, still the air could scarcely be kept separate. No, that would never do! Kiangsu and Chekiang may start fighting any day, and Fukien is even more out of the question. Szechuan? Kwangtung? They are in the midst of fighting.* What about Shantung or Honan? . . . No, one of them might be kidnapped, and if that happened the happy family would become an unhappy one. The rents in the foreign concessions in Shanghai and Tientsin are too high. . . . Somewhere abroad? Ridiculous. I don't know what Yunnan and Kweichow are like, but communications are too poor. . . ."

He racked his brains but, unable to think of a good place, decided to fix tentatively on A—. Then, however, he thought: "Nowadays many people object to the use of the Western alphabet to represent the names of people and places, saying it lessens the readers' interest. Probably I had better not use it in my story this time, to be on the safe side. In that case what would be a good place? There is fighting in Hunan too; the rents in Dairen have gone up again. In Chahar, Kirin and Heilungkiang I have heard there are brigands, so they won't do either! . . ."

Again he racked his brains to think of a good place, but in vain; so finally he made up his mind to fix ten-

* During this period there was civil war between warlords in many parts of China.

tatively on A— as the name of the place where his Happy Family should be.

“After all this Happy Family will have to be at A—. There can’t be any question about that. The family naturally consists of a husband and wife—the master and mistress—who married for love. Their marriage contract contains over forty terms going into great detail, so that they have extraordinary equality and absolute freedom. Moreover they have both had a higher education and belong to the cultured élite. . . . Japanese-returned students are no longer the fashion, so let them be Western-returned students. The master of the house always wears a foreign suit, his collar is always snowy white. His wife’s hair is always curled up like a sparrow’s nest in front, her pearly white teeth are always peeping out, but she wears Chinese dress. . . .”

“That won’t do, that won’t do! Twenty-five catties!”

Hearing a man’s voice outside the window he involuntarily turned his head to look. The sun shone through the curtains hanging by the window, dazzling his eyes, while he heard a sound like small bundles of wood being thrown down. “It doesn’t matter,” he thought, turning back again. “‘Twenty-five catties’ of what? . . . They are the cultured élite, devoted to the arts. But because they have both grown up in happy surroundings, they don’t like Russian novels. Most Russian novels describe the lower classes, so they are really quite out of keeping with such a family. ‘Twenty-five catties’? Never mind. In that case, what books do they read? . . . Byron’s poetry? Keats? That won’t do, neither of them are safe. . . . Ah, I have it: they both like reading *An Ideal Husband*. Although I haven’t read the book myself, even university professors praise it so highly that I am sure

this couple must enjoy it too. You read it, I read it—they have a copy each, two copies altogether in the family. . . .”

Becoming aware of a hollow feeling in his stomach, he put down the pen and rested his head on his hands, like a globe supported by two axles.

“ . . . The two of them are just having lunch,” he thought. “The table is spread with a snowy white table cloth, and the cook brings in the dishes—Chinese food. ‘Twenty-five catties.’ Of what? Never mind. Why should it be Chinese food? Westerners say Chinese cooking is the most progressive, the best to eat, the most hygienic; so they eat Chinese food. The first dish is brought in, but what is this first dish? . . .”

“Firewood. . . .”

He turned his head with a start, to see standing on his left the mistress of his own family, her two gloomy eyes fastened on his face.

“What?” He spoke rather indignantly, feeling that her coming disturbed his work.

“The firewood is all used up, so today I have bought some more. Last time it was still two hundred and forty cash for ten catties, but today he wants two hundred and sixty. Suppose I give him two hundred and fifty?”

“All right, two hundred and fifty, let it be.”

“He has weighed it very unfairly. He insists that there are twenty-four and a half catties, but suppose I count it as twenty-three and a half?”

“All right. Count it as twenty-three and a half catties.”

“Then, five fives are twenty-five, three fives are fifteen. . . .”

“Oh, five fives are twenty-five, three fives are fifteen. . . .” He could get no further either, but after stopping for a moment suddenly took up his pen and

started working out a sum on the lined paper on which he had written "A Happy Family." After working at it for some time he raised his head to say:

"Five hundred and eighty cash."

"In that case I haven't got enough here; I am still eighty or ninety short. . . ."

He pulled open the drawer of the desk, took out all the money in it—somewhere between twenty and thirty coppers—and put it in her outstretched hand. Then he watched her go out, and finally turned back to the desk. His head seemed to be bursting as if filled to the brim with sharp faggots. Five fives are twenty-five—scattered Arabic numerals were still imprinted on his brain. He gave a long sigh and breathed out again deeply, as if by this means he might expel the firewood, the "five fives are twenty-five," and the Arabic numerals which had stuck in his head. Sure enough, after breathing out his heart seemed much lighter, whereupon he started thinking vaguely again:

"What dish? It doesn't matter, so long as it is something out of the way. Fried pork or prawns' roe and sea-slugs are really too common. I must have them eating 'Dragon and Tiger.' But what is that exactly? Some people say it's made of snakes and cats, and is an upper-class Cantonese dish, only eaten at big feasts. But I've seen the name on the menu in a Kiangsu restaurant; still, Kiangsu people aren't supposed to eat snakes or cats, so it must be, as someone else said, made of frogs and eels. Now what part of the country shall this couple be from? Never mind. After all, people from any part of the country can eat a dish of snake and cat (or frog and eel), without injuring their Happy Family. At any rate, this first dish is to be 'Dragon and Tiger'; there can be no question about that.

"Now that this bowl of 'Dragon and Tiger' is placed in the middle of the table, they take up their chopsticks simultaneously, point to the dish, smile sweetly at each other and say, in a foreign tongue:

"Chérie, s'il vous plaît!"

"Voulez-vous commencer, chéri!"

"Mais non, après vous!"

"Then they reach out their chopsticks simultaneously, and simultaneously take a morsel of snake—no, no, snake's flesh really sounds too peculiar; it would be better after all to say a morsel of eel. It is settled then that 'Dragon and Tiger' is made of frogs and eels. They pick out two morsels of eel simultaneously, exactly the same size. Five fives are twenty-five, three fives. . . . Never mind. And simultaneously put them in their mouths. . . ." Against his will he wanted to turn round, because he was conscious of a good deal of excitement behind him, and considerable coming and going. But he persevered, and pursued his train of thought distractedly:

"This seems rather sentimental; no family would behave like this. Whatever makes me so woolly-minded? I'm afraid this good subject will never be written up. . . . Or perhaps there is no need to have returned students; people who have received higher education in China would do just as well. They are both university graduates, the cultured élite, the élite. . . . The man is a writer; the woman is also a writer, or else a lover of literature. Or else the woman is a poetess; the man is a lover of poetry, a respecter of womanhood. Or else. . . ."

Finally he could contain himself no longer, and turned round.

Beside the bookcase behind him had appeared a mound of cabbages, three at the bottom, two above,

and one at the top, confronting him like a large letter A.

"Oh!" He started and gave a sigh, feeling his cheeks burn, while prickles ran up and down his spine. "Ah!" He took a very deep breath to get rid of the prickly feeling in his spine, then went on thinking: "The house of the Happy Family must have plenty of rooms. There is a store-room where things like cabbages are put. The master's study is apart, its walls lined with bookshelves; there are naturally no cabbages there. The shelves are filled with Chinese books and foreign books, including of course *An Ideal Husband*—two copies altogether. There is a separate bedroom, a brass bedstead, or something simpler like one of the elmwood beds made by the convicts of Number One Prison would do equally well. Beneath the bed is very clean. . . ." He glanced beneath his own bed; the firewood had all been used up, and there was only a piece of straw rope left, still coiling there like a dead snake.

"Twenty-three and a half catties. . . ." He felt that the firewood was just about to pour in a never-ending stream under his bed, and his head ached again, so he got up quickly and went to the door to close it. But he had scarcely put his hand on the door when he felt that this was overhasty and let it go instead, dropping the door curtain that was thick with dust. At the same time he thought: "This method avoids the severity of shutting oneself in, as well as the discomfort of keeping the door open; it is quite in keeping with the *Doctrine of the Mean*.*"

" . . . So the master's study door is always closed." He walked back, sat down and thought, "Anyone with

* A Confucian classic, advocating the principle of moderation in all things.

business must first knock at the door, and have his permission to come in; that is really the only thing to be done. Now suppose the master is sitting in his study and the mistress comes to discuss literature, she knocks too. . . . At least of this one can be assured—she will not bring in any cabbages.

“‘Entrez, chérie, s’il vous plaît.’

“But what happens when the master has no time to discuss literature? Does he ignore her, hearing her stand outside tapping gently on the door? That probably wouldn’t do. Maybe it is all described in *An Ideal Husband*—that must really be an excellent novel. If I get paid for this article I must buy a copy to read!”

Slap!

His back stiffened, because he knew from experience that this slapping sound was made by his wife’s hand striking their three-year-old daughter’s head.

“In a Happy Family . . .” he thought, his back still rigid, hearing the child sobbing, “children are born late, yes, born late. Or perhaps it would be better to have none at all, just two people without any ties. . . . Or it might be better to stay in a hotel and let them look after everything, a single man without. . . .” Hearing the sound of sobbing increasing in volume, he stood up and brushed past the curtain, thinking, “Karl Marx wrote his *Das Kapital* while his children were crying around him. He must really have been a great man. . . .” He walked out, opened the outer door, and was assailed by a strong smell of kerosene. The child was lying to the right of the door, face downwards. As soon as she saw him she started crying aloud.

“There, there, all right! Don’t cry, don’t cry! There’s a good girl.” He bent down to pick her up. Having picked her up he turned round to see his wife

standing furiously to the left of the door, also with a rigid back, her hands on her hips as if she were preparing to start physical exercises.

"Even you have to come and bully me! You can't help, you only make trouble—even the kerosene lamp had to turn over. What shall we light this evening? . . ."

"There, there, all right! Don't cry, don't cry!" Ignoring his wife's trembling tones, he carried the child into the house, and stroked her head. "There's a good girl," he repeated. Then he put her down, pulled out a chair and sat down. Setting her between his knees, he raised his hand. "Don't cry, there's a good girl," he said. "Daddy will do 'Pussy Washing' for you." At the same time he craned his neck, licked his palms from a distance twice, then with them traced circles towards his face.

"Aha! Pussy!" She started laughing.

"That's right, that's right. Pussy." He traced several more circles, and then stopped, seeing her smiling at him with tears still in her eyes. It struck him suddenly that her sweet, innocent face was just like her mother's five years ago, especially her bright red lips, although the general outline was smaller. That had been another bright winter's day when she heard his decision to overcome all obstacles and sacrifice everything for her; when she too looked at him in the same way, smiling, with tears in her eyes. He sat down disconsolately, as if a little drunk.

"Ah, sweet lips," he thought.

The door curtain was suddenly fastened back and the firewood brought in.

Then, suddenly coming to himself again, he saw that the child, still with tears in her eyes, was looking at him with her bright red lips parted. "Lips. . . ." He glanced sideways to where the firewood was be-

ing brought in. “. . . Probably it will be nothing but five fives are twenty-five, nine nines are eighty-one, all over again! . . . And two gloomy eyes. . . .” So thinking he snatched up the green-lined paper with the heading and the figures written on it, crumpled it up and then unfolded it again to wipe her eyes and nose. “Good girl, run along and play by yourself.” He pushed her away as he spoke, at the same time throwing the ball of paper into the waste-paper basket.

But at once he felt rather sorry for the child, and, turning his head, followed her with his eyes as she walked forlornly away, while his ears were filled with the sound of firewood. Determined to concentrate, he turned back again and closed his eyes to put a stop to all distracting thoughts, sitting there quietly and peacefully.

He saw passing before him a flat, round, black-freckled flower with an orange centre, which floated from the left of his left eye right over to the opposite side where it disappeared; then a bright green flower, with a dark green centre; and finally a pile of six cabbages which formed themselves before him into an enormous letter A.

March 19, 1924

SOAP

With her back to the north window in the slanting sunlight, Ssu-min's wife was pasting paper money for the dead with her eight-year-old daughter, Hsiu-erh, when she heard the slow, heavy footsteps of someone in cloth shoes and knew her husband was back. She paid no attention, though, simply went on pasting coins. But the tread of cloth shoes drew nearer and nearer, till it finally stopped beside her. Then she could not help looking up to see Ssu-min before her, hunching his shoulders and stooping forward to fumble desperately under his cloth jacket in the inner pocket of his long gown.

By dint of twisting and turning he extracted his hand at last with a small oblong package in it, which he handed to his wife. As she took it, she smelt an indefinable fragrance rather reminiscent of olive. On the green paper wrapper was a bright golden seal with a network of tiny designs. Hsiu-erh bounded forward to seize this and look at it, but her mother promptly pushed her aside.

"Been shopping? . . ." she asked as she looked at it.

"Er — yes." He stared at the package in her hand.

The green paper wrapper was opened. Inside was a layer of very thin paper, also a sunflower-green, and not till this was unwrapped was the object itself exposed—glossy and hard, besides being sunflower-green, with another network of fine designs on it. The thin paper was a cream colour, it appeared. The

indefinable fragrance rather reminiscent of olive was stronger now.

"My, this is really good soap!"

She held the soap to her nose as gingerly as if it were a child, and sniffed at it as she spoke.

"Er — yes. Just use this in future. . . ."

As he spoke, she noticed him eyeing her neck, and felt herself flushing up to her cheekbones. Sometimes when she rubbed her neck, especially behind the ears, her fingers detected a roughness; and though she knew this was the accumulated dirt of many years, she had never given it much thought. Now, under his scrutiny, she could not help blushing as she looked at this green, foreign soap with the curious scent, and this blush spread right to the tips of her ears. She mentally resolved to have a thorough wash with this soap after supper.

"There are places you can't wash clean just with honey locust pods,"* she muttered to herself.

"Ma, can I have this?" As Hsiu-erh reached out for the sunflower-green paper, Chao-erh, the younger daughter who had been playing outside, came running in too. Mrs. Ssu-min promptly pushed them both aside, folded the thin paper in place, wrapped the green paper round it as before, then leant over to put it on the highest shelf of the wash-stand. After one final glance, she turned back to her paper coins.

"Hsueh-cheng!" Ssu-min seemed to have remembered something. He gave a long-drawn-out shout, sitting down on a high-backed chair opposite his wife.

"Hsueh-cheng!" she helped him call.

She stopped pasting coins to listen, but not a sound could she hear. When she saw him with upturned

* In many parts of China, honey locust pods were used for washing. They were cheaper than soap, but not so effective.

head waiting so impatiently, she felt quite apologetic.

"Hsueh-cheng!" she called shrilly at the top of her voice.

This call indeed proved effective, for they heard the tramp of leather shoes draw near, and Hsueh-cheng was standing before her. He was in shirt sleeves, and his plump round face was shiny with perspiration.

"What were you doing?" she asked disapprovingly. "Why didn't you hear your father call?"

"I was practising Hexagram Boxing. . . ." He turned at once to his father and straightened up, looking at him as if to ask what he wanted.

"Hsueh-cheng, I want to ask you the meaning of *o-du-fu*."*

"*O-du-fu*? . . . Isn't it a very fierce woman?"

"What nonsense! The idea!" Ssu-min was suddenly furious. "Am I a woman, pray?"

Hsueh-cheng recoiled two steps, and stood straighter than ever. Though his father's gait sometimes reminded him of the way old men walked in Peking opera, he had never considered Ssu-min as a woman. His answer, he saw now, had been a great mistake.

"As if I didn't know *o-du-fu* means a very fierce woman. Would I have to ask *you* that?—This isn't Chinese, it's foreign devils' language, I'm telling you. What does it mean, do you know?"

"I . . . I don't know." Hsueh-cheng felt even more uneasy.

"Pah! What use is it my spending all that money to send you to school if you don't even understand a little thing like this? Your school boasts that it lays equal stress on speech and comprehension, yet it hasn't taught you anything. The ones speaking

* In Chinese this means "vicious wife."

this devils' language couldn't have been more than fourteen or fifteen, actually a little younger than you, yet they were chattering away in it, while you can't even tell me the meaning. And you have the face to answer 'I don't know.' Go and look it up for me at once!"

"Yes," answered Hsueh-cheng deep down in his throat, then respectfully withdrew.

"I don't know what students today are coming to," declared Ssu-min with emotion after a pause. "As a matter of fact, in the time of Kuang Hsu,* I was all in favour of opening schools; but I never foresaw how great the evils would be. What 'emancipation' and 'freedom' have we had? There is no true learning, nothing but absurdities. I've spent quite a bit of money on Hsueh-cheng, all to no purpose. It wasn't easy to get him into this half-Western, half-Chinese school, where they claim they lay equal stress on 'speaking and comprehending English.'** You'd think all should be well. But — bah! — arter one whole year of study he can't even understand *o-du-fu*! He must still be studying dead books. What use is such a school, I ask you? What I say is: Close the whole lot of them!"

"Yes, really, better close the whole lot of them," chimed in his wife sympathetically, pasting away at the paper money.

"There's no need for Hsiu-erh and her sister to attend any school. 'What's the good of girls studying?' as Ninth Grandpa said. When he opposed girls' schools I attacked him for it; but now I see the old folk were right after all. Just think, it's already in

* I.e. 1875-1908.

** English was taught in nearly all the new schools at that time, and learning to speak was considered as important as learning to read.

very poor taste the way women wander up and down the streets, and now they want to cut their hair as well. Nothing disgusts me so much as these short-haired schoolgirls. What I say is: There's some excuse for soldiers and bandits, but these girls are the ones who turn everything upside down. They ought to be very severely dealt with indeed. . . ."

"Yes, as if it wasn't enough for all men to look like monks, the women are imitating nuns."*

"Hsueh-cheng!"

Hsueh-cheng hurried in holding a small, fat, gilt-edged book, which he handed to his father.

"This looks like it," he said, pointing to one place. "Here. . . ."

Ssu-min took it and looked at it. He knew it was a dictionary, but the characters were very small and horizontally printed too. He turned frowning towards the window, and screwed up his eyes to read the passage Hsueh-cheng had pointed out.

"A society founded in the eighteenth century for mutual relief.'—No, that can't be it.—How do you pronounce this?" He pointed at the devils' word in front.

"Oddfellows."

"No, no, that wasn't it." Ssu-min suddenly lost his temper again. "I told you it was bad language, a swear-word of some sort, to abuse someone of my type. Understand? Go and look it up!"

Hsueh-cheng glanced at him several times, but did not move.

"This is too puzzling. How can he make head or tail of it? You must explain things clearly to him

* Monks and nuns in China shaved their heads. Hence, at the end of the Ching Dynasty and later, conservatives laughed at the men who cut their queues, claiming they looked like monks.

first, before he can look it up properly." Seeing Hsueh-cheng in a quandary, his mother felt sorry for him and intervened rather indignantly on his behalf.

"It was when I was buying soap at Kuang Jun Hsiang on the main street," sighed Ssu-min, turning to her. "There were three students shopping there too. Of course, to them I must have seemed a little pernickety. I looked at five or six kinds of soap all over forty cents, and turned them down. Then I looked at some priced ten cents a cake, but it was too poor, with no scent at all. Since I thought it best to strike a happy mean, I chose that green soap at twenty-four cents a cake. The assistant was one of these supercilious young fellows with eyes on the top of his head, so he pulled a long dog's face. At that those impudent students started winking at each other and talking devils' language. Then I wanted to unwrap the soap and look at it before paying—for with all that foreign paper round it, how could I tell whether it was good or bad? But that supercilious young fellow not only refused, but was very unreasonable and passed some offensive remarks, at which those whipper-snappers laughed. It was the youngest of the lot who said that, looking straight at me, and the rest of them started laughing. So it must have been some bad word." He turned back to Hsueh-cheng. "Look for it in the section headed Bad Language!"

"Yes," answered Hsueh-cheng deep down in his throat, then respectfully withdrew.

"Yet they still shout 'New Culture! New Culture!' when the world's in such a state! Isn't this bad enough?" His eyes on the rafters, he went on. "The students have no morals, society has no morals. Unless we find some panacea, China will really be finished. Look, how pathetic that was. . . ."

"What?" asked his wife casually, not really curious.

"A filial daughter. . . ." His eyes came round to her, and there was respect in his voice. "There were two beggars on the main street. One was a girl who looked eighteen or nineteen. Actually, it's most improper to beg at that age, but beg she did. She was with an old woman of about seventy, who had white hair and was blind. They were begging under the eaves of that clothes shop, and everybody said how filial she was. The old one was her grandmother. Whatever trifle the girl received, she gave it to her grandmother, choosing to go hungry herself. But do you think people would give alms to even such a filial daughter?"

He fixed her with his eye, as if to test her intelligence.

She made no answer, but fixed him with *her* eye, as if waiting for him to elucidate.

"Bah — no!" He supplied the answer himself at last. "I watched for a long time, and saw one person only give her a copper. Plenty of others had gathered round, but only to jeer at them. There were two low types as well, one of whom had the impertinence to say:

"'Ah-fa! Don't be put off by the dirt on this piece of goods. If you buy two cakes of soap, and give her a good scrubbing, the result won't be bad at all!' Think, what a way to talk!"

She snorted and lowered her head. After quite a time, she asked rather casually: "Did *you* give her any money?"

"Did I? — No. I'd have felt ashamed to give just one or two coins. She wasn't an ordinary beggar, you know. . . ."

"Mm." Without waiting for him to finish she stood up slowly and walked to the kitchen. Dusk was gathering, and it was time for supper.

Ssu-min stood up too, and walked into the courtyard. It was lighter out than in. Hsueh-cheng was practising Hexagram Boxing in a corner by the wall. This constituted his "home education," and he used the economical method of employing the hour between day and night for this purpose. Hsueh-cheng had been boxing now for about half a year. Ssu-min nodded very slightly, as if in approval, then began to pace the courtyard with his hands behind his back. Before long, the broad leaves of the evergreen which was the only potted plant they had were swallowed up in the darkness, and stars twinkled between white clouds which looked like torn cotton. Night had fallen. Ssu-min could not repress his growing indignation. He felt called on to do great deeds, to declare war on all the bad students around and on this wicked society. By degrees he grew bolder and bolder, his steps became longer and longer, and the thud of his cloth soles grew louder and louder, waking the hen and her chicks in the coop so that they cheeped in alarm.

A light appeared in the hall — the signal that supper was ready — and the whole household gathered round the table in the middle. The lamp stood at the lower end of the table, while Ssu-min sat alone at the head. His plump, round face was like Hsueh-cheng's, with the addition of two sparse whiskers. Seen through the hot vapour from the vegetable soup, he looked like the God of Wealth you find in temples. On the left sat Mrs. Ssu-min and Chao-erh, on the right Hsueh-cheng and Hsiu-erh. Chopsticks pattered like rain against the bowls. Though no one said a word, their supper table was very animated.

Chao-erh upset her bowl, spilling soup over half the table. Ssu-min opened his narrow eyes as wide as he could. Only when he saw she was going to cry did he stop glaring at her and reach out with his chopsticks

for a tender morsel of cabbage he had spotted. But the tender morsel had disappeared. He looked right and left, and discovered Hsueh-cheng on the point of stuffing it into his wide-open mouth. Disappointed, he ate a mouthful of yellowish leaves instead.

"Hsueh-cheng!" He looked at his son. "Have you found that phrase or not?"

"Which phrase? — No, not yet!"

"Pah! Look at you, not a good student and with no sense either — all you can do is eat! You should learn from that filial daughter: although she's a beggar, she still treats her grandmother very respectfully, even if it means going hungry herself. But what do you impudent students know of such things? You'll grow up like those low types. . . ."

"I've thought of one possibility, but I don't know if it's right. . . . I think, perhaps, they may have said *o-du-fu-la* (Chinese transliteration of 'old fool' — *Translator*)."

"That's right! That's it exactly! That's exactly the sound it was: *o-du-fu-la*. What does that mean? You belong to the same group: you must know."

"Mean? — I'm not sure what it means."

"Nonsense. Don't try to deceive me. You're all a bad lot."

"'Even thunder won't strike folk at meat,'" burst out Mrs. Ssu-min suddenly. "Why do you keep losing your temper today? Even at supper you can't stop hitting the hen while pointing at the dog. What do boys that age understand?"

"What?" Ssu-min was on the point of answering back when he saw her sunken cheeks were quivering with anger, her colour had changed, and a fearful glint had come into her triangular eyes. He hastily changed his tune. "I've not been losing my temper. I'm just telling Hsueh-cheng to learn a little sense."

"How can he understand what's in *your* mind?" She looked angrier than ever. "If he had any sense, he'd long since have lit a lantern or a torch and gone out to fetch that filial daughter. You've already bought her one cake of soap: all you have to do is buy another. . . ."

"Nonsense! That's what that low type said."

"I'm not so sure. If you buy another cake and give her a good scrubbing, then worship her, the whole world will be at peace."

"How can you say such a thing? What connection is there? Because I remembered you'd no soap. . . ."

"There's a connection all right. You bought it specially for the filial daughter; so go and give her a good scrubbing. I don't deserve it. I don't want it. I don't want to share her glory."

"Really, how can you talk like that?" mumbled Ssu-min. "You women. . . ." His face was perspiring like Hsueh-cheng's after Hexagram Boxing, probably mostly because the food had been so hot.

"What about us women? We women are much better than you men. If you men aren't cursing eighteen or nineteen-year-old girl students, you're praising eighteen or nineteen-year-old girl beggars: such dirty minds you have! Scrubbing, indeed!—Disgusting!"

"Didn't you hear? That was one of those low types. . . ."

"Ssu-min!" A thundering voice was heard from the darkness outside.

"Tao-tung? I'm coming!"

Ssu-min knew this was Ho Tao-tung, famed for his powerful voice, and he shouted back as joyfully as a criminal newly reprieved.

"Hsueh-cheng, hurry up and light the lamp to show Uncle Ho into the library!"

Hsueh-cheng lit a candle, and ushered Tao-tung into a room on the west. They were followed by Pu Wei-yuan.

"I'm sorry I didn't welcome you. Excuse me." With his mouth still full of rice, Ssu-min came in and bowed with clasped hands in greeting. "Won't you join us at our simple meal? . . ."

"We've already eaten," Wei-yuan stepped forward and greeted him. "We've hurried here at this time of night because of the eighteenth essay and poem contest of the Moral Rearmament Literary League. Isn't tomorrow the seventeenth?"

"What? Is it the sixteenth today?" asked Ssu-min in surprise.

"See how absent-minded you are!" boomed Tao-tung.

"So we'll have to send something in tonight to the newspaper office, to make sure they print it tomorrow."

"I've already drafted the title of the essay. See whether you think it will do or not." As he was speaking, Tao-tung produced a slip of paper from his handkerchief and handed it to Ssu-min.

Ssu-min stepped up to the candle, unfolded the paper, and read it word by word: "We humbly suggest an essay in the name of the whole nation to beg the President to issue an order for the promotion of the Confucian classics and the worship of the mother of Mencius,* in order to revive this moribund world and preserve our national character.' Very good. Very good. Isn't it a little long, though?"

"That doesn't matter," answered Tao-tung loudly, "I've worked it out, and it won't cost more to advertise. But what about the title for the poem?"

* A woman famous for her virtue. According to tradition, she moved house three times to avoid undesirable companions for her son.

"The title for the poem?" Ssu-min suddenly looked most respectful. "I've thought of one. How about The Filial Daughter? It's a true story, and she deserves to be eulogized. On the main street today. . . ."

"Oh, no, that won't do," put in Wei-yuan hastily, waving his hand to stop Ssu-min. "I saw her too. She isn't from these parts, and I couldn't understand her dialect, nor she mine. I don't know where she's from. Everyone says she's filial; but when I asked her if she could write poems, she shook her head. If she could, that would be fine."*

"But since loyalty and filial piety are so important, it doesn't matter too much if she can't write poems. . . ."

"That isn't true. Quite otherwise." Wei-yuan raised his hands and rushed towards Ssu-min, to shake and push him. "She'd only be interesting if she could write poems."

"Let's use this title." Ssu-min pushed him aside. "Add an explanation and print it. In the first place, it will serve to eulogize her; in the second, we can use this to criticize society. What is the world coming to anyway? I watched for some time, and didn't see anybody give her a cent — aren't people utterly heartless. . . ."

"Aiya, Ssu-min!" Wei-yuan rushed over again. "You're cursing baldheads to a monk. I didn't give her anything because I didn't happen to have any money on me."

"Don't be so sensitive, Wei-yuan." Ssu-min pushed him aside again. "Of course you're an exception. Let me finish. There was quite a crowd around them,

* In old China, it was considered romantic for women to exchange ideas with men through the medium of poems. The fashionable courtesans could write poetry.

showing no respect, just jeering. There were two low types as well, who were even more impertinent. One of them said: 'Ah-fa! If you buy two cakes of soap and give her a good scrubbing, the result won't be bad at all!' Just think. . . ."

"Ha, ha! Two cakes of soap!" Tao-tung suddenly bellowed with laughter, nearly splitting their eardrums. "Buy soap! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Tao-tung! Tao-tung! Don't make such a noise!" Ssu-min gave a start, panic-stricken.

"A good scrubbing! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Tao-tung!" Ssu-min looked stern. "We're discussing serious matters. Why should you make such a noise, nearly deafening everyone? Listen to me: we'll use both these titles, and send them straight to the newspaper office so that they come out without fail tomorrow. I'll have to trouble you both to take them there."

"All right, all right. Of course," agreed Wei-yuan readily.

"Ha, ha! A good scrubbing! Ho, ho!"

"Tao-tung!" shouted Ssu-min, furious.

This shout made Tao-tung stop laughing. After they had drawn up the explanation, Wei-yuan copied it on the paper and left with Tao-tung for the newspaper office. Ssu-min carried the candle to see them out, then walked back to the door of the hall feeling rather apprehensive. After some hesitation, though, he finally crossed the threshold. As he went in, his eyes fell on the small, green, oblong package of soap in the middle of the central table, the gold characters on it glittering in the lamplight, with fine designs around them.

Hsiu-erh and Chao-erh were playing on the floor at the lower end of the table, while Hsueh-cheng sat on the right side looking up something in his dictionary. Last of all, on the high-backed chair in the shadows far

from the lamp, Ssu-min discovered his wife. Her impassive face showed neither joy nor anger, and she was staring at nothing.

"A good scrubbing indeed! Disgusting!"

Faintly, Ssu-min heard Hsiu-erh's voice behind him. He turned, but she was not moving. Only Chao-erh had put both small hands to her face as if to shame somebody.

This was no place for him. He blew out the candle, and went into the yard to pace up and down. And, because he forgot to be quiet, the mother hen and her chicks started cheeping again. At once he walked more lightly, moving further away. After a long time, the lamp in the hall was transferred to the bedroom. The moonlight on the ground was like seamless white gauze, and the moon — quite full — seemed a jade disc among the bright clouds.

He felt not a little depressed, as if he, like the filial daughter, was "utterly forlorn and alone." That night he slept very late.

By the next morning, however, the soap was being honoured by being used. Getting up later than usual, he saw his wife leaning over the wash-stand rubbing her neck, with bubbles like those emitted by great crabs heaped up over both her ears. The difference between these and the small white bubbles produced by honey locust pods was like that between heaven and earth. After this, an indefinable fragrance rather reminiscent of olive always emanated from Mrs. Ssu-min. Not for nearly half a year did this suddenly give place to another scent, which all who smelt it averred was like sandalwood.

March 22, 1924

THE MISANTHROPE

I

My friendship with Wei Lien-shu, now that I come to think of it, was certainly a strange one. It began and ended with a funeral.

When I lived in S—, I often heard him mentioned as an odd fellow: after studying zoology, he had become a history teacher in a middle school; he treated others in cavalier fashion, yet liked to concern himself with their affairs; and while maintaining that the family system should be abolished, he would remit his salary to his grandmother the same day that he drew it. He had many other strange ways, enough to set tongues wagging in the town. One autumn I stayed at Hanshihshan with some relatives also named Wei, who were distantly related to him. However, they understood him even less, looking on him as if he were a foreigner. "He's not like us!" they said.

This was not strange, for although China had had modern schools for some twenty years, there was not even a primary school in Hanshihshan. He was the only one to have left that mountain village to study; hence in the villagers' eyes he was an undoubted freak. They also envied him, though, saying he had made much money.

Towards the end of autumn, there was an epidemic of dysentery in the village, and in alarm I thought of returning to the town. I heard his grandmother had

contracted the disease too, and because of her age her case was serious. Moreover there was not a single doctor in the village. Wei had no other relative but this grandmother, who led a simple life with a maid-servant. As he had lost both parents in his childhood, she had brought him up. She was said to have known much hardship earlier, but was now leading a comfortable life. Since he had neither wife nor children, however, his family was very quiet, and this presumably was one of the things considered freakish about him.

The village was more than thirty miles from the town by land, and more than twenty miles by water: so that it would take four days to fetch Wei back. In this out-of-the-way village such matters were considered momentous news, eagerly canvassed by all. The next day the old woman was reported to be in a critical state, and the messenger on his way. However, before dawn she died, her last words being:

“Why won’t you let me see my grandson?”

Elders of the clan, close relatives, members of his grandmother’s family and others, crowded the room anticipating Wei’s return, which would be in time for the funeral. The coffin and shroud had long been ready, but the immediate problem was how to cope with this grandson, for they expected he would insist on changes in the funeral rites. After a conference, they decided on three terms which he must accept. First, he must wear deep mourning; secondly, he must kowtow to the coffin; and, thirdly, he must let Buddhist monks and Taoist priests say mass. In short, all must be done in the traditional manner.

This decision once reached, they decided to gather there in full force when Wei arrived home, to assist each other in this negotiation which could admit of no compromise. Licking their lips, the villagers eagerly

awaited developments. Wei, as a "modern," "a follower of foreign creeds," had always proved unreasonable. A struggle would certainly ensue, which might even result in some novel spectacle.

He arrived home, I heard, in the afternoon, and only bowed to his grandmother's shrine as he entered. The elders proceeded at once according to plan. They summoned him to the hall, and after a lengthy preamble led up to the subject. Then, speaking in unison and at length, they gave him no chance to argue. At last, however, they dried up, and a deep silence fell in the hall. All eyes fastened fearfully on his lips. But without changing countenance, he answered simply:

"All right."

This was totally unexpected. A weight had been lifted from their minds, yet their hearts felt heavier than ever, for this was so "freakish" as to give rise to anxiety. The villagers looking for news were also disappointed, and said to each other, "Strange. He said, 'All right.' Let's go and watch." Wei's "all right" meant that all would be in accordance with tradition, in which case it was not worth watching; still, they wanted to look on, and after dusk the hall filled with light-hearted spectators.

I was one of those who went, having first sent along my gift of incense and candles. As I arrived he was already putting the shroud on the dead. He was a thin man with an angular face, hidden to a certain extent by his dishevelled hair, dark eyebrows and moustache. His eyes gleamed darkly. He laid out the body very well, as deftly as an expert, so that the spectators were impressed. According to the local custom, at a married woman's funeral members of the dead woman's family found fault even if all was well done; however he remained silent, complying with

their wishes with a face devoid of all expression. A grey-haired old woman standing before me gave a sigh of envy and respect.

Then people kowtowed; then they wailed, all the women chanting as they wailed. When the body was put in the coffin, all kowtowed again, then wailed again, until the lid of the coffin was nailed down. Silence reigned for a moment, and then there was a stir of surprise and dissatisfaction. I too suddenly realized that Wei had not shed a single tear from beginning to end. He was simply sitting on the mourner's mat, his two eyes gleaming darkly.

In this atmosphere of surprise and dissatisfaction, the ceremony ended. The disgruntled mourners seemed about to leave, but Wei was still sitting on the mat, lost in thought. Suddenly, tears fell from his eyes, then he burst into a long wail like a wounded wolf howling in the wilderness at the dead of night, anger and sorrow mingled with his agony. This was not in accordance with tradition and, taken by surprise, we were at a loss. After a little hesitation, some went to try to persuade him to stop, and these were joined by more and more people until finally there was a crowd round him. But he sat there wailing, motionless as an iron statue.

With a sense of anti-climax, the crowd dispersed. Wei continued to cry for about half an hour, then suddenly stopped, and without a word to the mourners went straight inside. Later it was reported by spies that he had gone into his grandmother's room, lain down on the bed and, to all appearances, fallen sound asleep.

Two days later, on the eve of my return to town, I heard the villagers discussing eagerly, as if they were possessed, how Wei intended to burn most of his dead grandmother's furniture and possessions, giving the

rest to the maidservant who had served her during her life and attended her on her deathbed. Even the house was to be lent to the maid for an indefinite period. Wei's relatives argued themselves hoarse, but could not shake his resolution.

Largely out of curiosity, perhaps, on my way back I passed his house and went in to express condolence. He received me wearing a hemless white mourning dress, and his expression was as cold as ever. I urged him not to take it so to heart, but apart from grunting noncommittally all he said was:

"Thanks for your concern."

II

Early that winter we met for the third time. It was in a book-shop in S—, where we nodded simultaneously, showing at least that we were acquainted. But it was at the end of that year, after I lost my job, that we became friends. Thenceforward I paid Wei many visits. In the first place, of course, I had nothing to do; in the second place he was said to sympathize with lame dogs, despite his habitual reserve. However, fortune being fickle, lame dogs do not remain lame for ever, hence he had few steady friends. Report proved true, for as soon as I sent in my card, he received me. His sitting-room consisted of two rooms thrown into one, quite bare of ornament, with nothing in it apart from table and chairs, but some bookcases. Although he was reputed to be terribly "modern," there were few modern books on the shelves. He knew that I had lost my job; but after the usual polite remarks had been exchanged, host and guest sat silent, with nothing to say to each other. I noticed he very quickly finished his cigarette, only

dropping it to the ground when it nearly burnt his fingers.

"Have a cigarette," he said suddenly, reaching for another.

So I took one and, between puffs, spoke of teaching and books, still finding very little to say. I was just thinking of leaving when shouts and footsteps were heard outside the door, and four children rushed in. The eldest was about eight or nine, the smallest four or five. The hands, faces and clothes were very dirty, and they were thoroughly unprepossessing; yet Wei's face lit up with pleasure, and getting up at once he walked to the other room, saying:

"Come, Ta-liang, Erh-liang, all of you! I have bought the mouth-organs you wanted yesterday."

The children rushed in after him, to return immediately with a mouth-organ apiece; but once outside they started fighting, and one of them cried.

"There's one each; they're exactly the same. Don't squabble!" he said as he followed them.

"Whose children are they?" I asked.

"The landlord's. They have no mother, only a grandmother."

"Your landlord is a widower?"

"Yes. His wife died three or four years ago, and he has not remarried. Otherwise, he would not rent his spare rooms to a bachelor like me." He said this with a cold smile.

I wanted very much to ask why he had remained single so long, but I did not know him well enough.

Once you knew him well, he was a good talker. He was full of ideas, many of them quite remarkable. What exasperated me were some of his guests. As a result, probably, of reading Yu Ta-fu's* romantic stories,

* A contemporary of Lu Hsun's, who wrote about repressed young men.

they constantly referred to themselves as "the young unfortunate" or "the outcast"; and, sprawling on the big chairs like lazy and arrogant crabs, they would sigh, smoke and frown all at the same time.

Then there were the landlord's children, who were always fighting among themselves, knocking over bowls and plates, begging for cakes, keeping up an ear-splitting din. Yet the sight of them invariably dispelled Wei's customary coldness, and they seemed to be the most precious thing in his life. Once the third child was said to have measles. He was so worried that his dark face took on an even darker hue. The attack proved a light one, however, and thereafter the children's grandmother made a joke of his anxiety.

"Children are always good. They are all so innocent. . . ." He seized an opening to say one day, having, apparently, sensed my impatience.

"Not always," I answered casually.

"Always. Children have none of the faults of grown-ups. If they turn out badly later, as you contend, it is because they have been moulded by their environment. Originally they are not bad, but innocent. . . . I think China's only hope lies in this."

"I don't agree. Without the root of evil, how could they bear evil fruit in later life? Take a seed, for example. It is because it contains the embryo leaves, flowers and fruits, that it can grow later into these things. There must be a cause. . . ." Since my unemployment, just like those great officials who resigned from office and took up Buddhism, I had been reading the Buddhist sutras. I did not understand Buddhist philosophy though, and was just talking at random.

However, Wei was annoyed. He gave me a look, then said no more. I could not tell whether he had no more to say, or whether he felt it not worth arguing

with me. But he looked cold again, as he had not done for a long time, and smoked two cigarettes one after the other in silence. By the time he reached for the third cigarette, I had to beat a retreat.

Our estrangement lasted three months. Then, owing in part to forgetfulness, in part to the fact that he fell out with those "innocent" children, he came to consider my slighting remarks on children as excusable. Or so I surmised. This happened in my house after drinking one day, when, with a rather melancholy look, he cocked his head, and said:

"Come to think of it, it's really curious. On my way here I met a small child with a reed in his hand, which he pointed at me, shouting, 'Kill!' He was just a toddler. . . ."

"He must have been moulded by his environment."

As soon as I had said this, I wanted to take it back. However, he did not seem to care, just went on drinking heavily, smoking furiously in between.

"I meant to ask you," I said, trying to change the subject. "You don't usually call on people, what made you come out today? I've known you for more than a year, yet this is the first time you've been here."

"I was just going to tell you: don't call on me for the time being. There are a father and son in my place who are a perfect pest. They are scarcely human!"

"Father and son? Who are they?" I was surprised.

"My cousin and his son. Well, the son resembles the father."

"I suppose they came to town to see you and have a good time?"

"No. They came to talk me into adopting the boy."

"What, to adopt the boy?" I exclaimed in amazement. "But you are not married."

"They know I won't marry. But that's nothing to them. Actually they want to inherit that tumble-down house of mine in the village. I have no other property, you know; as soon as I get money I spend it. I've only that house. Their purpose in life is to drive out the old maidservant who is living in the place for the time being."

The cynicism of his remark took me aback. However I tried to soothe him, by saying:

"I don't think your relatives can be so bad. They are only rather old-fashioned. For instance, that year when you cried bitterly, they came forward eagerly to plead with you. . . ."

"When I was a child and my father died, I cried bitterly because they wanted to take the house from me and make me put my mark on the document, and they came forward eagerly *then* to plead with me. . . ." He looked up, as if searching the air for that bygone scene.

"The crux of the matter is — you have no children. Why don't you get married?" I had found a way to change the subject, and this was something I had been wanting to ask for a long time. It seemed an excellent opportunity.

He looked at me in surprise, then dropped his gaze to his knees, and started smoking. I received no answer to my question.

III

Yet, even this inane existence he was not allowed to enjoy in peace. Gradually there appeared anonymous attacks in the less reputable papers, and in the schools rumours spread concerning him. This was not the simple gossip of the old days, but deliberately

damaging. I knew this was the outcome of articles he had taken to writing for the magazines, so I paid no attention. The citizens of S— disliked nothing more than fearless argument, and anyone guilty of it would indubitably become the object of secret attacks. This was the rule, and Wei knew it too. However, in spring, when I heard he had been asked to resign by the school authorities, I confessed it surprised me. Of course, this was only to be expected, and it surprised me simply because I had hoped my friend could escape. The citizens of S— were not proving more vicious than usual.

I was occupied then with my own problems, negotiating to go to a school in Shanyang that autumn, so I had no time to call on him. Some three months passed before I was at leisure, and even then it had not occurred to me to visit him. One day, passing the main street, I happened to pause before a second-hand bookstall, where I was startled to see displayed an early edition of the *Commentaries on Ssuma Chien's History*,* from Wei's collection. He was no connoisseur, but he loved books, and I knew he prized this particular book. He must be very hard pressed to have sold it. It seemed scarcely possible he could have become so poor only two or three months after losing his job; yet he spent money as soon as he had it, and had never saved. So I decided to call on him. On the same street I bought a bottle of liquor, two packages of peanuts and two smoked fish-heads.

His door was closed. I called out twice, but there was no reply. Thinking he was asleep, I called louder, hammering on the door at the same time.

"He's probably out." The children's grandmother,

* By Ssuma Chen of the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

a fat woman with small eyes, thrust her grey head out from the opposite window, and spoke impatiently.

"Where has he gone?" I asked.

"Where? Who knows — where could he go? You can wait, he will be back soon."

So I pushed open the door and went into his sitting-room. It was greatly changed, looking desolate in its emptiness. There was little furniture left, while all that remained of his library were those foreign books which could not be sold. The middle of the room was still occupied by the table round which those woeful and gallant young men, unrecognized geniuses, and dirty, noisy children had formerly gathered. Now it all seemed very quiet, and there was a thin layer of dust on the table. I put the bottle and packages down, pulled over a chair, and sat down by the table facing the door.

Very soon, sure enough, the door opened, and someone stepped in as silently as a shadow. It was Wei. It might have been the twilight that made his face look dark; but his expression was unchanged.

"Ah, it's you? How long have you been here?" He seemed pleased.

"Not very long," I said. "Where have you been?"

"Nowhere in particular. Just taking a stroll."

He pulled up a chair too and sat by the table. We started drinking, and spoke of his losing his job. However, he did not care to talk much about it, considering it as only to be expected. He had come across many similar cases. It was not strange at all, and not worth discussing. As usual, he drank heavily, and discoursed on society and the study of history. Something made me glance at the empty bookshelves, and, remembering the *Commentaries on Ssuma Chien's History*, I was conscious of a slight loneliness and sadness.

"Your sitting-room has a deserted look. . . . Have you had fewer visitors recently?"

"None at all. They don't find it much fun when I'm not in a good mood. A bad mood certainly makes people uncomfortable. Just as no one goes to the park in winter. . . ."

He took two sips of liquor in succession, then fell silent. Suddenly, looking up, he asked, "I suppose you have had no luck either in finding work?"

Although I knew he was only venting his feelings as a result of drinking, I felt indignant at the way people treated him. Just as I was about to say something, he pricked up his ears, then, scooping up some peanuts, went out. Outside, the laughter and shouts of the children could be heard.

But as soon as he went out, the children became quiet. It sounded as if they had left. He went after them, and said something, but I could hear no reply. Then he came back, as silent as a shadow, and put the handful of peanuts back in the package.

"They don't even want to eat anything I give them," he said sarcastically, in a low voice.

"Old Wei," I said, forcing a smile, although I was sick at heart, "I think you are tormenting yourself unnecessarily. Why think so poorly of your fellow men?"

He only smiled cynically.

"I haven't finished yet. I suppose you consider people like me, who come here occasionally, do so in order to kill time or amuse themselves at your expense?"

"No, I don't. Well, sometimes I do. Perhaps they come to find something to talk about."

"Then you are wrong. People are not like that. You are really wrapping yourself up in a cocoon. You should take a more cheerful view." I sighed.

"Maybe. But tell me, where does the thread for the cocoon come from? Of course, there are plenty of people like that; take my grandmother, for example. Although I have none of her blood in my veins, I may inherit her fate. But that doesn't matter, I have already bewailed my fate together with hers. . . ."

Then I remembered what had happened at his grandmother's funeral. I could almost see it before my eyes.

"I still don't understand why you cried so bitterly," I said bluntly.

"You mean at my grandmother's funeral? No, you wouldn't." He lit the lamp. "I suppose it was because of that that we became friends," he said quietly. "You know, this grandmother was my grandfather's second wife. My father's own mother died when he was three." Growing thoughtful, he drank silently, and finished a smoked fish-head.

"I didn't know it to begin with. Only, from my childhood I was puzzled. At that time my father was still alive, and our family was well off. During the lunar New Year we would hang up the ancestral images and hold a grand sacrifice. It was one of my rare pleasures to look at those splendidly dressed images. At that time a maidservant would always carry me to an image, and point at it, saying: 'This is your own grandmother. Bow to her so that she will protect you and make you grow up strong and healthy.' I could not understand how I came to have another grandmother, in addition to the one beside me. But I liked this grandmother who was 'my own.' She was not as old as the granny at home. Young and beautiful, wearing a red costume with golden embroidery and a headdress decked with pearls, she resembled my mother. When I looked at her, her eyes

seemed to gaze down on me, and a faint smile appeared on her lips. I knew she was very fond of me too.

"But I liked the granny at home too, who sat all day under the window slowly plying her needle. However, no matter how merrily I laughed and played in front of her, or called to her, I could not make her laugh; and that made me feel she was cold, unlike other children's grandmothers. Still, I liked her. Later on, though, I gradually cooled towards her, not because I had grown older and learned she was not my own grandmother, but rather because I was exasperated by the way she kept on sewing mechanically, day in day out. She was unchanged, however. She sewed, looked after me, loved and protected me as before; and though she seldom smiled, she never scolded me. It was the same after my father died. Later on, we lived almost entirely on her sewing, so it was still the same, until I went to school. . . ."

The light flickered as the kerosene gave out, and he stood up to refill the lamp from a small tin kettle under the bookcase.

"The price of kerosene has gone up twice this month," he said slowly, after turning up the wick. "Life will become harder every day. She remained the same until I graduated from school and got a job, when our life became more secure. She didn't change, I suppose, until she was sick and couldn't carry on, but had to take to her bed. . . ."

"Since her later days, I think, were not too unhappy on the whole, and she lived to a great age, I need not have mourned. Besides, weren't there a lot of others there eager to wail? Even those who had tried their hardest to rob her, wailed, or appeared bowed down with grief." He laughed. "However, at that moment her whole life rose to my mind — the life of one who created loneliness for herself and tasted its bitterness.

And I felt there were many people like that. I wanted to weep for them; but perhaps it was largely because I was too sentimental. . . .

"Your present advice to me is what I felt with regard to her. But actually my ideas at that time were wrong. As for myself, since I grew up my feelings for her cooled. . . ."

He paused, with a cigarette between his fingers; and bending his head lost himself in thought. The lamp-light flickered.

"Well, it is hard to live so that no one will mourn for your death," he said, as if to himself. After a pause he looked up at me, and said, "I suppose you can't help? I shall have to find something to do very soon."

"Have you no other friends you could ask?" I was in no position to help myself then, let alone others.

"I have a few, but they are all in the same boat. . . ."

When I left him, the full moon was high in the sky and the night was very still.

IV

The teaching profession in Shanyang was no bed of roses. I taught for two months without receiving a cent of salary, until I had to cut down on cigarettes. But the school staff, even those earning only fifteen or sixteen dollars a month, were easily contented. They all had iron constitutions steeled by hardship, and, although lean and haggard, would work from morning till night; while if interrupted at work by their superiors, they would stand up respectfully. Thus they all practised plain living and high thinking. This reminded me, somehow, of Wei's parting words. He was then even more hard up, and often looked embarrassed,

having apparently lost his former cynicism. When he heard that I was leaving, he had come late at night to see me off, and, after hesitating for some time, had stuttered:

"Would there be anything for me there? Even copying work, at twenty to thirty dollars a month, would do. I . . ."

I was surprised. I had not thought he would consider anything so low, and did not know how to answer.

"I . . . I have to live a little longer. . . ."

"I'll look out when I get there. I'll do my best."

This was what I had promised at the time, and the words often rang in my ears later, as if Wei were before me, stuttering: "I have to live a little longer." I tried to interest various people in his case, but to no avail. There were few vacancies, and many unemployed; they always ended by apologizing for being unable to help, and I would write him an apologetic letter. By the end of the term, things had gone from bad to worse. The magazine *Reason*, edited by some of the local gentry, began to attack me. Naturally no names were mentioned, but it cleverly insinuated that I was stirring up trouble in the school, even my recommendation of Wei being interpreted as a manoeuvre to gather a clique about me.

So I had to keep quiet. Apart from attending class, I lay low in my room, sometimes even fearing I might be considered as stirring up trouble when cigarette smoke escaped from my window. For Wei, naturally, I could do nothing. This state of affairs prevailed till midwinter.

It had been snowing all day, and the snow had not stopped by evening. Outside was so still, you could almost hear the sound of stillness. I closed my eyes and sat there in the dim lamplight, doing nothing, imagining the snow-flakes falling to fill the boundless

drifts of snow. It would be nearly New Year at home too, and everybody would be busy. I saw myself a child again, making a snow man with a group of children on the level ground in the back yard. The eyes of the snow man, made of jet-black fragments of coal, suddenly turned into Wei's eyes.

"I have to live a little longer." The same voice again.

"What for?" I asked inadvertently, aware immediately of the ineptitude of my remark.

It was this reply that woke me up. I sat up, lit a cigarette and opened the window, only to find the snow falling even faster. Then I heard a knock at the door, and a moment later it opened to admit the servant, whose step I knew. He handed me a big envelope, more than six inches in length. The address was scrawled, but I saw Wei's name on it.

This was the first letter he had written me since I left S—. Knowing he was a bad correspondent, I had not wondered at his silence, only sometimes I had felt he should have given me some news of himself. So the receipt of this letter was quite a surprise. I tore it open. The letter had been hastily scrawled, and said:

". . . Shen-fei,

"How should I address you? I am leaving a blank for you to fill in as you please. It will be all the same to me.

"I have altogether received three letters from you. I did not reply for one simple reason: I had no money even to buy stamps.

"Perhaps you would like to know what has happened to me. To put it simply: I have failed. I thought I had failed before, but I was wrong then; now, however, I am really a failure.

Formerly there was someone who wanted me to live a little longer, and I wished it too, but found it difficult. Now, there is no need, yet I must go on living. . . .

"Shall I then live on?

"The one who wanted me to live a little longer could not live himself. He was trapped and killed by the enemy. Who killed him? No one knows.

"Changes take place so swiftly! During the last half year I have virtually been a beggar; it's true, I could be considered a beggar. However, I had my purpose: I was willing to beg for the cause, to go cold and hungry for it, to be lonely for it, to suffer hardship for it. But I did not want to destroy myself. So you see, the fact that one person wanted me to live on, proved extremely potent. But now there is no one, not one. At the same time I feel I do not deserve to live, nor do some other people either, in my opinion. Yet, I am conscious of wanting to live on to spite those who wish me dead; for at least there is no one left who wants me to live decently, and so no one can be hurt. I don't want to hurt such people. But now there is no one, not one. What a joy! Wonderful! I am now doing what I formerly detested and opposed. I am now giving up all I formerly believed in and upheld. I have really failed—but I have won.

"Do you think I am mad? Do you think I have become a hero or a great man? No, it is not that. It is very simple; I have become adviser to General Tu, hence I have eighty dollars salary a month.

". . . Shen-fei,

"What will you think of me? You decide; it is the same to me.

"Perhaps you still remember my former sitting-room, the one in which we had our first and last talks. I am still using it. There are new guests, new bribes, new flattery, new seeking for promotion, new kowtows and bows, new mah-jong and drinking games, new haughtiness and disgust, new sleeplessness and vomiting of blood. . . .

"You said in your last letter that your teaching was not going well. Would you like to be an adviser? Say the word, and I will arrange it for you. Actually, work in the gatehouse would be the same. There would be the same guests, bribes and flattery. . . .

"It is snowing heavily here. How is it where you are? It is now midnight, and having just vomited some blood has sobered me. I recall that you have actually written three times in succession to me since autumn—amazing! So I must give you some news of myself, hoping you will not be shocked.

"I probably shall not write again; you know my ways of old. When will you be back? If you come soon, we may meet again. Still, I suppose we have taken different roads, so you had better forget me. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for trying to find work for me. But now please forget me; I am doing 'well.'

Wei Lien-shu

December 14th."

Though this letter did not "shock" me, when, after a hasty perusal, I read it carefully again, I felt both

uneasy and relieved. At least his livelihood was secure, and I need not worry any more. At any rate, I could do nothing here. I thought of writing to him, but felt there was nothing to say.

In fact, I was gradually forgetting him. His face no longer sprang so often to my mind's eye. However, less than ten days after hearing from him, the office of the S— Weekly started sending me its paper. I did not read such papers as a rule, but since it was sent to me I glanced at some of the contents. And this reminded me of Wei, for the paper frequently carried poems and essays about him, such as "Calling on the scholar Wei at night during a snowstorm," "A poetic gathering at the scholarly abode of Adviser Wei," and so forth. Once, indeed, under the heading "Table Talk," they retailed with gusto certain stories which had previously been considered material for ridicule, but which had now become "Tales of an Eccentric Genius." Only an exceptional man, it was implied, could have done such unusual things.

Although this recalled him to me, my impression of him was growing fainter. Yet all the time he seemed to be gaining a closer hold on me, which often gave me an inexplicable sense of uneasiness and cast a shadow of apprehension. However, by autumn the newspaper stopped coming, while the Shanyang magazine began to publish the first instalment of a long essay called "The element of truth in rumours," which asserted that rumours about certain gentlemen had reached the ears of the mighty. My name was among those attacked. I had then to be very careful. I had to take care that my cigarette smoke did not get in other people's way. All these precautions took so much time I could attend to nothing else, and naturally had no leisure to think of Wei. I had actually forgotten him.

However, I could not hold my job till summer. By the end of May I had left Shanyang.

V

I wandered between Shanyang, Licheng and Taiku for more than half a year, but could find no work, so I decided to go back to S—. I arrived one afternoon in early spring. It was a cloudy day with everything wrapped in mist. Since there were vacant rooms in my old hostel, I stayed there. On the road I had started thinking of Wei, and after my arrival I made up my mind to call on him after dinner. Taking two packages of the well-known Wenhsi cakes, I threaded my way through several damp streets, stepping cautiously past many sleeping dogs, until I reached his door. It seemed very bright inside. I thought even his rooms were better lit since he had become an adviser, and smiled to myself. However, when I looked up, I saw a strip of white paper* stuck on the door. It occurred to me, as I stepped inside, that the children's grandmother might be dead; but I went straight in.

In the dimly lit courtyard there was a coffin, by which some soldier or orderly in uniform was standing, talking to the children's grandmother. A few workers in short coats were loitering there too. My heart began to beat faster. Just then she turned to look at me.

"Ah, you're back? Why didn't you come earlier?" she suddenly exclaimed.

* White is the mourning colour in China. White paper on the door indicated that there had been a death in the house.

"Who . . . who has passed away?" Actually by now I knew, but yet I asked.

"Adviser Wei died the day before yesterday."

I looked around. The sitting-room was dimly lit, probably by one lamp only; the front room, however, was decked with white funeral curtains, and the woman's grandchildren had gathered outside that room.

"His body is there," she said, coming forward and pointing to the front room. "After Mr. Wei was promoted, I let him my front room too; that is where he is now."

There was no writing on the funeral curtain. In front stood a long table, then a square table, spread with some dozen dishes. As I went in, two men in long white gowns suddenly appeared to bar the way, their eyes, like those of a dead fish, fixed in surprise and mistrust on my face. I hastily explained my relation with Wei, and the landlady came up to confirm my statement. Then their hands and eyes dropped, and they allowed me to go forward to bow to the dead.

As I bowed, a wail sounded beside me from the floor. Looking down I saw a child of about ten, kneeling on a mat, also dressed in white. His hair had been cut short, and had some hemp attached to it.

Later I found out one of these men was Wei's cousin, his nearest in kin, while the other was a distant nephew. I asked to be allowed to see Wei, but they tried their best to dissuade me, saying I was too "polite." Finally they gave in, and lifted the curtain.

This time I saw Wei in death. But, strangely enough, though he was wearing a crumpled shirt, stained in front with blood, and his face was very lean, his expression was unchanged. He was sleep-

ing so placidly, with closed mouth and eyes, that I was tempted to put my finger before his nostrils to see if he were still breathing.

Everything was deathly still, both the living and the dead. As I withdrew, his cousin accosted me to state that Wei's untimely death, just when he was in the prime of life and had a great future before him, was not only a calamity for his humble family but a cause of sorrow for his friends. He seemed to be apologizing for Wei for dying. Such eloquence is rare among villagers. However, after that he fell silent again, and everything was deathly still, both the living and the dead.

Feeling cheerless, but by no means sad, I withdrew to the courtyard to chat with the old woman. She told me the funeral would soon take place; they were waiting for the shroud. And when the coffin was nailed down, people born under certain stars should not be near. She rattled on, her words pouring out like a flood. She spoke of Wei's illness, incidents during his life, and even voiced certain criticisms.

"You know, after Mr. Wei came into luck, he was a different man. He held his head high and looked very haughty. He stopped treating people in his old pedantic way. Did you know, he used to act like an idiot, and call me madam? Later on," she chuckled, "he called me 'old bitch'; it was too funny for words. When people sent him rare herbs like atractylis, instead of eating them himself, he would throw them into the courtyard, just here, and call out, 'You take this, old bitch!' After he came into luck, he had scores of visitors; so I vacated my front room for him, and moved into a side one. As we have always said jokingly, he became a different man after his good luck. If you had come one month earlier, you could have seen all the fun here: drinking games

practically every day, talking, laughing, singing, poetry writing and mah-jong games. . . .

"He used to be more afraid of children than they are of their own father, practically grovelling to them. But recently that changed too, and he was a good one for jokes. My grandchildren liked to play with him, and would go to his rooms whenever they could. He would think up all sorts of practical jokes. For instance, when they wanted him to buy things for them, he would make them bark like dogs or make a thumping kowtow. Ah, that was fun. Two months ago, my second grandchild asked him to buy him a pair of shoes, and had to make three thumping kowtows. He's still wearing them; they aren't worn out yet."

When one of the men in white came out, she stopped talking. I asked about Wei's illness, but there was little she could tell me. She knew only that he had been losing weight for a long time, but they had thought nothing of it because he always looked so cheerful. About a month before, they heard he had been coughing blood, but it seemed he had not seen a doctor. Then he had to stay in bed, and three days before he died he seemed to have lost the power of speech. His cousin had come all the way from the village to ask him if he had any savings, but he said not a word. His cousin thought he was shamming, but some people had said those dying of consumption did lose the power of speech. . . .

"But Mr. Wei was a queer man," she suddenly whispered. "He never saved money, always spent it like water. His cousin still suspects we got something out of him. Heaven knows, we got nothing. He just spent it in his haphazard way. Buying something today, selling it tomorrow, or breaking it up—God knows what happened. When he died there was

nothing left, all spent! Otherwise it would not be so dismal today. . . .

"He just fooled about, not wanting to do the proper thing. I had thought of that, and spoken to him. At his age, he should have got married; it would have been easy for him then. And if no suitable family could be found, at least he could have bought a few concubines to go on with. People should keep up appearances. But he would laugh whenever I brought it up. 'Old bitch, you are always worrying about such things for other people,' he would say. He was never serious, you see; he wouldn't listen to good advice. If he had listened to me, he wouldn't be wandering lonely in the nether world now; at least there would be wailing from his dear ones. . . ."

A shop assistant arrived, bringing some clothes with him. The three relatives of the dead picked out the underwear, then disappeared behind the curtain. Soon, the curtain was lifted; the new underwear had been put on the corpse, and they proceeded to put on his outer garments. I was surprised to see them dress him in a pair of khaki military trousers with broad red stripes, and a tunic with glittering epaulettes. I could not say what rank these indicated, or how he acquired it. Then the body was placed in the coffin. Wei lay there awkwardly, a pair of brown leather shoes beside his feet, a paper sword at his waist, and beside his lean and ashen face a military cap with a gilt band.

The three relatives wailed beside the coffin, then stopped and wiped their tears. The boy with hemp attached to his hair withdrew, as did the old woman's third grandchild—no doubt they were born under the wrong stars.

As the labourers lifted the coffin lid, I stepped forward to see Wei for the last time.

In his awkward costume he lay placidly, with closed mouth and eyes. There seemed to be an ironical smile on his lips, mocking the ridiculous corpse.

When the nails began to be hammered in, the wailing started afresh. I could not stand it very long, so withdrew to the courtyard; then, somehow, I was out of the gate. The damp road glistened, and I looked up at the sky where the cloud banks had scattered and a full moon hung, shedding a cool light.

I walked with quickened steps, as if eager to break through some heavy barrier, but finding it impossible. Something struggled in my ears, and, after a long, long time, burst out. It was like a long howl, the howl of a wounded wolf crying in the wilderness in the depth of night, anger and sorrow mingled in its agony.

Then my heart felt lighter, and I paced calmly on along the damp cobbled road under the moon.

October 17, 1925

REGRET FOR THE PAST

Chuan-sheng's Notes

I want, if I can, to describe my remorse and grief for Tzu-chun's sake as well as for my own. This shabby room, tucked away in a forgotten corner of the hostel, is so quiet and empty. Time really flies. A whole year has passed since I fell in love with Tzu-chun, and, thanks to her, escaped from this dead quiet and emptiness. On my return, as ill luck would have it, this was the only room vacant. The broken window with the half dead locust tree and old wistaria outside and square table inside are the same as before. The same too are the mouldering wall and wooden bed beside it. At night I lie in bed alone just as I did before I started living with Tzu-chun. The past year has been blotted out as if it had never been—as if I never moved out of this shabby room to set up a small home so hopefully in Chichao Street.

Nor is that all. A year ago this silence and emptiness were different—there was often an expectancy about them. I was expecting Tzu-chun's arrival. As I waited long and impatiently, the tapping of high heels on the brick pavement would galvanize me into life. Then I would see her pale round face dimpling in a smile, her thin white arms, striped cotton blouse and black skirt. And she would bring in a new leaf from the half withered locust tree outside the window for me to look at, or clusters of the mauve flowers

that hung from the old wistaria tree, the trunk of which looked as if made of iron.

But now there is only the old silence and emptiness. Tzu-chun will not be coming again—never, never again.

In Tzu-chun's absence, I could see nothing in this shabby room. Out of sheer boredom I would pick up a book—science or literature, it was all the same to me—and read on and on, till I realized I had turned a dozen pages without taking in a word I had read. Only my ears were so sensitive, I seemed able to hear all the footsteps outside the gate, those of Tzu-chun among the rest. Her steps often sounded as if they were drawing nearer and nearer—only to grow fainter again, until they were lost in the tramping of other feet. I hated the servant's son who wore cloth-soled shoes which sounded quite different from Tzu-chun's. I hated the minx next door who used face cream, who often wore new leather shoes, and whose steps sounded all too like Tzu-chun's.

Could her rickshaw have been upset? Could she have been knocked over by a tram? . . .

I would be on the point of putting on my hat to go and see her, but her uncle had cursed me to my face.

Suddenly I would hear her coming nearer step by step, and by the time I was out to meet her she would already have passed the wistaria trellis, her face dimpling in a smile. Probably she wasn't badly treated after all in her uncle's home. I would calm down and, after we had gazed at each other in silence for a moment, the shabby room would be filled with the sound of my voice as I held forth on the tyranny of the home, the need to break with tradition, the equality of men and women, Ibsen, Tagore and Shelley. . . . She would nod her head, smiling, her eyes filled with

a childlike look of wonder. On the wall was nailed a copperplate bust of Shelley, cut out from a magazine. It was one of the best likenesses of him, but when I pointed it out to her she only gave it a hasty glance, then hung her head as if in embarrassment. In matters like this, Tzu-chun probably hadn't yet freed herself entirely from old ideas. It occurred to me later it might be better to substitute a picture of Shelley being drowned in the sea, or a portrait of Ibsen. But I never got round to it. And now even this picture has vanished.

"I'm my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me."

She came out with this statement clearly, firmly and gravely, after a thoughtful silence—we had been talking about her uncle who was here and her father who was at home. We had then known each other for half a year. By that time I had told her all my views, all that had happened to me, and what my failings were. I had hidden very little, and she understood me completely. These few words of hers stirred me to the bottom of my heart, and rang in my ears for many days after. I was unspeakably happy to know that Chinese women were not as hopeless as the pessimists made out, and that we should see them in the not too distant future in all their glory.

Each time I saw her out, I always kept several paces behind her. And always the old man's face with its whiskers like fishy tentacles would be pressed so hard against the dirty windowpane, even the tip of his nose was flattened. While when we reached the outer courtyard, against the bright glass window there was that little fellow's face, plastered with face cream. But walking out proudly, without looking right or left,

Tzu-chun did not see them. And I walked proudly back.

"I'm my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me." Her mind was completely made up on this point. She was by far the more thoroughgoing and resolute of the two of us. What did she care about the half pot of face cream or the flattened nose tip?

I can't remember clearly now how I expressed my true, passionate love for her. Not only now—even just after it happened, my impression was very blurred. When I thought back at night, I could only remember snatches of what I had said; while during the month or two after we started living together, even these fragments vanished like a dream without a trace. I only remember how for about a fortnight beforehand I had reflected very carefully what attitude to adopt, prepared what to say, and decided what to do if I were refused. But when the time came it was all no use. In my nervousness, I unconsciously used the method I had seen in the movies. The memory of this makes me thoroughly ashamed, yet this is the one thing I remember clearly. Even today it is like a solitary lamp in a dark room, lighting me up as I clasped her hand with tears in my eyes, and went down on one knee. . . .

I did not even see clearly how Tzu-chun reacted at the time. All I know was that she accepted me. However, I seem to remember her face first turned pale then gradually flushed red—redder than I have ever seen it before or since. Sadness and joy flashed from her childlike eyes, mingled with apprehension, although she struggled to avoid my gaze, looking as if she would like to fly out of the window in her confusion. Then I knew she consented, although I

didn't know what she said, or whether she said anything at all.

She, however, remembered everything. She could recite all that I said non-stop, as if she had learned it by heart; and describe all my actions in detail, to the life, like a film unfolding itself before my eyes, which included, naturally, that shallow scene from the movies which I was anxious to forget. At night, when all was still, it was our time for review. I was often questioned and examined, or ordered to retell all that had been said on that occasion; but she often had to fill up gaps and correct my mistakes, as if I were a Grade D student.

Gradually these reviews became few and far between. But whenever I saw her gazing raptly into space, a tender look coming over her and dimpling, I knew she was going over that old lesson again, and would be afraid she was seeing my ridiculous act from the movies. I knew, though, that she must have seen it, and that she insisted on seeing it.

But she didn't find it ridiculous. Though I thought it laughable, even contemptible, she didn't find it so at all. And I knew this was because she loved me so truly and passionately.

Late spring last year was our happiest and busiest time. I was calmer then, although one part of my mind became as active as my body. This was when we started going out together. We went several times to the park, but more often to look for lodgings. On the road I was conscious of searching looks, sarcastic smiles or lewd and contemptuous glances which tended, if I was not careful, to make me shiver. At every instant I had to summon all my pride and defiance to my support. She was quite fearless, however, and completely impervious to all this. She pro-

ceeded slowly forward, as calmly as if there were nobody in sight.

It was no easy matter finding lodgings. In most cases we were refused on some pretext, while some places we turned down as unsuitable. In the beginning we were very particular—and yet not too particular either, because we saw most of these lodgings did not look like places where we could live. Later on, all we asked was to be tolerated. We had looked at over twenty places, before we found one we could make do—two rooms facing north in a small house in Chichao Street. The owner of the house was a small official, but an intelligent man, who only occupied the central and side rooms. His household consisted simply of a wife, a baby a few months old, and a maid from the country. As long as the child didn't cry, it would be very quiet.

Our furniture, simple as it was, had already taken the greater part of the money I had raised: and Tzu-chun had sold her only gold ring and ear-rings too. I tried to stop her, but she insisted, so I didn't press the point. I knew, if she hadn't a share in our home, she would feel uncomfortable.

She had already quarrelled with her uncle—in fact he was so angry that he had disowned her. And I had broken with several friends who thought they were giving me good advice but were actually either afraid for me, or jealous. Still, this meant we were very quiet. Although it was nearly dark when I left the office, and the rickshaw man went so slowly, the time always came when we were together again. First we would look at each other in silence, then relax and talk intimately, and finally fall silent again, bowing our heads without thinking of anything in particular. Gradually I was able to read her soberly like a book, body and soul. In a mere three weeks

I learned much more about her, and broke down barriers which I had not known to exist, but now discovered had been real barriers.

As the days passed, Tzu-chun became more lively. However, she didn't like flowers. I bought two pots of flowers at the fair, but after four days without watering they died neglected in a corner. I hadn't the time to see to everything. She had a liking for animals, though, which she may have picked up from the official's wife; and in less than a month our household was greatly increased. Four chicks of ours started picking their way across the courtyard with the landlady's dozen. But the two mistresses could tell them apart, each able to spot her own. Then there was a spotted dog, bought at the fair. I believe he had a name to begin with, but Tzu-chun gave him a new one — Ahsui. And I called him Ahsui too, though I didn't like the name.

It is true that love must be constantly renewed, must grow and create. When I spoke of this to Tzu-chun, she nodded understandingly.

Ah, what peaceful, happy evenings those were!

Tranquillity and happiness must be consolidated, so that they may last for ever. When we were in the hostel, we had occasional differences of opinion or misunderstandings; but after we moved into Chichao Street even these slight differences vanished. We just sat opposite each other in the lamplight, reminiscing, savouring again the joy of the new harmony which had followed our disputes.

Tzu-chun grew plumper and her cheeks became rosier; the only pity was she was too busy. Her housekeeping left her no time even to chat, much less to read or go out for walks. We often said we would have to get a maid.

Another thing that upset me when I got back in the evening, was to see her try to hide a look of unhappiness or—and this depressed me even more—force a smile onto her face. Luckily I discovered this was owing to her secret feud with the petty official's wife, and the bone of contention was the chicks. But why wouldn't she tell me? People ought to have a home of their own. This was no place to live in.

I had my routine too. Six days of the week I went from home to the office and from the office home. In the office I sat at my desk endlessly copying official documents and letters. At home I kept her company or helped her light the stove, cook rice or steam bread. This was when I learned to cook.

Still, I ate much better than when I was in the hostel. Although cooking was not Tzu-chun's strongest point, she threw herself into it heart and soul. Her ceaseless anxieties on this score made me anxious too, and in this way we shared the sweet and the bitter together. She kept at it so hard all day, perspiration made her short hair stick to her head, and her hands grew rough.

And then she had to feed Ahsui and the chicks . . . nobody else could do this.

I told her, I would rather not eat than see her work herself to the bone like this. She just gazed at me without a word, rather wistfully; and I couldn't very well say any more. But she went on working as hard as ever.

Finally the blow I had been expecting fell. The evening before the Double Tenth Festival, I was sitting idle while she was washing the dishes, when we heard a knock on the door. When I went to open it,

I found the messenger from our office who handed me a mimeographed slip of paper. I guessed what it was, and when I took it to the lamp, sure enough, it read:

By order of the commissioner, Shih
Chuan-sheng is discharged.

The secretariat.
October 9th.

I had foreseen this while we were still in the hostel. That Face Cream was one of the gambling friends of the commissioner's son. She was bound to spread rumours and try to make trouble. I was only surprised this hadn't happened sooner. In fact this was really no blow, because I had already decided I could work as a clerk somewhere else or teach, or, although it was a little more difficult, do some translation work. I knew the editor of *Freedom's Friend*, and had corresponded with him a couple of months previously. But all the same, my heart was thumping. What distressed me most was that even Tzu-chun, fearless as she was, had turned pale. Recently she seemed to have grown weaker.

"What does it matter?" she said. "We'll make a new start, won't we? We'll. . . ."

She didn't finish, and her voice sounded flat. The lamplight seemed unusually dim. Men are really laughable creatures, so easily upset by trifles. First we gazed at each other in silence, then started discussing what to do. Finally we decided to live as economically as possible on the money we had, to advertise in the paper for a post as clerk or teacher, and to write at the same time to the editor of *Freedom's Friend*, explaining my present situation and asking him to accept a translation to help me out of this difficulty.

"As good said as done! Let's make a fresh start."

I went straight to the table and pushed aside the bottle of vegetable oil and dish of vinegar, while Tzu-chun brought over the dim lamp. First I drew up the advertisement; then I made a selection of books to translate. I hadn't looked at my books since we moved house, and each volume was thick with dust. Finally I wrote the letter.

I hesitated for a long time over the wording of the letter, and when I stopped writing to think, and glanced at her in the dusky lamplight, she was looking very wistful again. I had never imagined a trifle like this could cause such a striking change in someone so firm and fearless as Tzu-chun. She really had grown much weaker lately—it wasn't something that had just started that evening. This made me feel more put out. I had a sudden vision of a peaceful life—the quiet of my shabby room in the hostel flashed before my eyes, and I was just going to take a good look at it when I found myself back in the dusky lamplight again.

After a long time the letter was finished. It was very lengthy, and I was so tired after writing it, I realized I must have grown weaker myself lately too. We decided to send in the advertisement and post the letter the next day. Then with one accord we straightened up, silently, as if conscious of each other's fortitude and strength, and able to see new hope growing from this fresh beginning.

Actually, this blow from outside infused a new spirit into us. In the office I had lived like a wild bird in a cage, given just enough canary-seed by its captor to keep alive, but not to grow fat. And as time passed it would lose the use of its wings, so that if ever it were let out of the cage it could no longer fly. Now,

at any rate, I had got out of the cage, and must soar anew in the wide sky before it was too late, while I could still flap my wings.

Of course we could not expect results from a small advertisement right away. However, translating is not so simple either. You read something and think you understand it, but when you come to translate it difficulties crop up everywhere, and it's very slow going. Still, I determined to do my best. In less than a fortnight, the edge of a fairly new dictionary was black with my finger-prints, which shows how seriously I took my work. The editor of *Freedom's Friend* had said that his magazine would never ignore a good manuscript.

Unfortunately, there was no room where I could be undisturbed, and Tzu-chun was not as quiet or considerate as she had been. Our room was so cluttered up with dishes and bowls and filled with smoke, it was impossible to work steadily there. But of course I had only myself to blame for this—it was my fault for not being able to afford a study. On top of this there was Ahsui and the chicks. And the chicks had grown into hens now, and were more of a bone of contention than ever between the two families.

Then there was the never-ending business of eating every day. All Tzu-chun's efforts seemed to be devoted to our meals. One ate to earn, and earned to eat; while Ahsui and the hens had to be fed too. Apparently she had forgotten all she had ever learned, and did not realize that she was interrupting my train of thought when she called me to meals. And although I sometimes showed a little displeasure as I sat down, she paid no attention at all, just went on munching away quite unconcerned.

It took her five weeks to learn that my work could not be restricted by regular eating hours. When she did realize it she was probably annoyed, but she said nothing. After that my work did go forward faster, and soon I had translated 50,000 words. I had only to polish the manuscript, and it could be sent in with two already completed shorter pieces to *Freedom's Friend*. Those meals were still a headache though. It didn't matter if the dishes were cold, but there wasn't enough of them. My appetite was much smaller than before, now that I was sitting at home all day using my brain, but even so there wasn't always even enough rice. It had been given to Ahsui, sometimes along with the mutton which I myself rarely had a chance of eating recently. She said Ahsui was so thin, it was really pathetic, and it made the landlady sneer at us. She couldn't stand being laughed at.

So there were only the hens to eat my left-overs. It was a long time before I realized this. I was very conscious, however, that my "place in the universe," as Huxley describes it, was only somewhere between the dog and the hens.

Later on, after much argument and insistence, the hens started appearing on our table, and we and Ahsui were able to enjoy them for over ten days. They were very thin, though, because for a long time they had only been fed a few grains of *kaoliang* a day. After that life became much more peaceful. Only Tzu-chun was very dispirited, and seemed so sad and bored without them, she grew rather sulky. How easily people change!

However, Ahsui too would have to be given up. We had stopped hoping for a letter from anywhere, and for a long time Tzu-chun had had no food left to get

the dog to beg or stand on his hind legs. Besides, winter was coming on very fast, and we didn't know what to do about a stove. His appetite had long been a heavy liability, of which we were all too conscious. So even the dog had to go.

If we had tied a tag to him and taken him to the market to sell, we might have made a few coppers. But neither of us could bring ourselves to do this.

Finally I muffled his head in a cloth and took him outside the West Gate where I let him loose. When he ran after me, I pushed him into a pit that wasn't too deep.

When I got home, I found it more peaceful; but I was quite taken aback by Tzu-chun's tragic expression. I had never seen her so woebegone. Of course, it was because of Ahsui, but why take it so to heart? And I hadn't told her about pushing him into the pit.

That night, something icy crept into her expression too.

"Really!" I couldn't help saying. "What's got into you today, Tzu-chun?"

"What?" She didn't even look at me.

"You look so. . . ."

"It's nothing—nothing at all."

Eventually I realized she must consider me callous. Actually, when I was on my own I had got along very well, although I was too proud to mix much with family acquaintances. But since my move I had become estranged from all my old friends. Still, if I could only get away from all this, there were plenty of ways open to me. Now I had to put up with all these hardships mainly because of her sake—getting rid of Ahsui was a case in point. But Tzu-chun seemed too obtuse now even to understand that.

When I took an opportunity to hint this to her, she nodded as if she understood. But judging by her

later behaviour, she either didn't take it in or else didn't believe me.

The cold weather and her cold looks made it impossible for me to be comfortable at home. But where could I go? I could get away from her icy looks in the street and parks, but the cold wind outside just whistled through you. Finally I found a haven in the public library.

Admission was free, and there were two stoves in the reading room. Although the fire was very low, the mere sight of the stoves made one warm. There were no books worth reading: the old ones were out of date, and there were practically no new ones.

But I didn't go there to read. There were usually a few other people there, sometimes as many as a dozen, all thinly clad like me. We kept up a pretence of reading, in order to keep out of the cold. This suited me down to the ground. You were liable to meet people you knew on the road who would glance at you contemptuously, but here there was no trouble of that kind, because my acquaintances were all gathered round other stoves or warming themselves at the stoves in their own homes.

Although there were no books for me to read there, I found quiet in which to think. As I sat there alone thinking over the past, I felt that during the last half year for love—blind love—I had neglected all the important things in life. First and foremost, livelihood. A man must make a living before there can be any place for love. There must be a way out for those who struggle, and I hadn't yet forgotten how to flap my wings, though I was much weaker than before.

* * *

The room and the readers gradually faded. I saw fishermen in the angry sea, soldiers in the trenches,

dignitaries in their cars, speculators at the stock exchange, heroes in mountain forests, teachers on their platforms, night prowlers, thieves in the dark. . . . Tzu-chun was far away. She had lost all her courage in her resentment over Ahsui and absorption in her cooking. The strange thing was that she didn't look particularly thin. . . .

It grew colder. The few lumps of slow-burning hard coal in the stove had at last burnt out, and it was closing time. I had to go back to Chichao Street, to expose myself to that icy look. Of late I had sometimes been met with warmth, but this only upset me more. I remember one evening, from Tzu-chun's eyes flashed the childlike look I had not seen for so long, as she reminded me with a smile of something that had happened at the hostel. But there was a constant look of fear in her eyes too. The fact that I had treated her more coldly recently than she had me worried her. Sometimes I forced myself to talk and laugh to comfort her. But the emptiness of my laughter and speech, and the way it immediately echoed in my ears like a hateful sneer, was more than I could bear.

Tzu-chun may have felt it too, for after this she lost her wooden calm and, though she tried her best to hide it, often showed anxiety. She treated me, however, much more tenderly.

I wanted to speak to her plainly, but hadn't the courage. Whenever I made up my mind to speak, the sight of those childlike eyes compelled me, for the time being, to smile. But my smile turned straightway into a sneer at myself, and made me lose my cold composure.

After that she revived the old questions and started new tests, forcing me to give all sorts of hypocritical

answers to show my affection for her. Hypocrisy became branded on my heart, so filling it with falseness it was hard to breathe. I often felt, in my depression, that really great courage was needed to tell the truth; for a man who lacked courage and reconciled himself to hypocrisy would never find a new path. What's more, he just could not exist.

Then Tzu-chun started looking resentful. This happened for the first time one morning, one bitterly cold morning, or so I imagined. I smiled secretly to myself with cold indignation. All the ideas and intelligent, fearless phrases she had learnt were empty after all. Yet she did not realize this emptiness. She had given up reading long ago, and did not realize the first thing in life is to make a living, that to do this people must advance hand in hand, or go forward singly. All she could do was cling to someone else's clothing, making it difficult even for a fighter to struggle, and bringing ruin on both.

I felt that our only hope lay in parting. She ought to make a clean break. Suddenly I thought of her death, but immediately was ashamed and reproached myself. Happily it was morning, and there was plenty of time for me to tell her the truth. Whether or not we could make a fresh start depended on this.

I deliberately brought up the past. I spoke of literature, then of foreign authors and their works, of Ibsen's *Nora* and *The Woman of the Sea*. I praised *Nora* for being strong-minded. . . . All this had been said the previous year in the shabby room in the hostel, but now it rang hollow. As the words left my mouth I could not free myself from the suspicion that there was an unseen urchin behind me maliciously parroting all I said.

She listened, nodding in agreement, then was silent. I finished what I had to say abruptly, and my voice died away in the emptiness.

"Yes," she said after another silence, "but . . . Chuan-sheng, I feel you've changed a lot lately. Is it true? Tell me!"

This was a blow, but I took a grip of myself, and explained my views and proposals: make a fresh start and turn over a new leaf, to avoid being ruined together.

To clinch the matter, I said firmly:

" . . . Besides, you need have no more scruples but go boldly ahead. You asked me to tell the truth. Yes, we shouldn't be hypocritical. Well, to tell the truth—it's because I don't love you any more! Actually, this makes it better for you, because it'll be easier for you to work without any regret. . . ."

I was expecting a scene, but all that followed was silence. Her face turned ashy pale, like a corpse; but in a moment her colour came back, and that childlike look darted from her eyes. She looked all round, like a hungry child searching for its kind mother, but only looked into space. She fearfully avoided my eyes.

The sight was more than I could stand. Fortunately it was still early. I braved the cold wind to hurry to the library.

There I saw *Freedom's Friend*, with all my short articles in it. This took me by surprise, and seemed to bring me new life. "There are plenty of ways open to me," I thought. "But things can't go on like this."

I started calling on old friends with whom I had had nothing to do for a long time, but didn't go more than once or twice. Naturally, their rooms were warm, but I felt chilled to the marrow there. And in the evenings I huddled in a room colder than ice.

An icy needle was piercing my heart, making me suffer continually from numb wretchedness. "There are plenty of ways open to me," I thought. "I haven't forgotten how to flap my wings." Suddenly I thought of her death, but immediately was ashamed and reproached myself.

In the library I often saw like a flash a new path ahead of me. I imagined she had faced up bravely to the facts and boldly left this icy home. Left it, what was more, without any malice towards me. Then I felt light as a cloud floating in the void, with the blue sky above and high mountains and great oceans below, big buildings and skyscrapers, battlefields, motorcars, thoroughfares, rich men's houses, bright, bustling markets, and the dark night. . . .

What's more, I really felt this new life was just round the corner.

Somehow we managed to live through the bitter Peking winter. But we were like dragonflies that had fallen into the hands of mischievous imps, to be tied with threads and played with and tormented at will. Although we had come through alive, we were prostrate, and the end was only a matter of time.

Three letters had been sent to the editor of *Freedom's Friend* before he replied. The envelope contained two book tokens, one for twenty cents, one for thirty cents. But I had spent nine cents on postage to press for payment, and gone hungry for a whole day, all for nothing.

However, I felt that at last I had got what I expected.

Winter was giving place to spring, and the wind was not quite so icy now. I spent more time wandering outside, and did not generally get home till dusk.

One dark evening, I came home listlessly as usual and, as usual, grew so depressed at the sight of our gate that I slowed down. Eventually, however, I reached my room. It was dark inside, and as I groped for the matches to strike a light, the place seemed extraordinarily quiet and empty.

I was standing there in bewilderment, when the official's wife called to me through the window.

"Tzu-chun's father came today," she said simply, "and took her away."

This was not what I had expected. I felt as if hit on the back of the head, and stood speechless.

"She went?" I finally managed to ask.

"Yes."

"Did—did she say anything?"

"No. Just asked me to tell you when you came back that she had gone."

I couldn't believe it: yet the room was so extraordinarily quiet and empty. I looked everywhere for Tzu-chun, but all I could see was the old, discoloured furniture which appeared very scattered, to show that it was incapable of hiding anyone or anything. It occurred to me she might have left a letter or at least jotted down a few words, but no. Only salt, dried paprika, flour and half a cabbage had been placed together, with a few dozen coppers at the side. These were all our worldly goods, and now she had carefully left all this to me, bidding me without words to use this to eke out my existence a little longer.

Feeling my surroundings pressing in on me, I hurried out to the middle of the courtyard, where all around was dark. Bright lamplight showed on the window paper of the central rooms, where they were teasing the baby to make her laugh. My heart grew calmer, and I began to glimpse a way out of this heavy oppression: high mountains and great marsh-

lands, thoroughfares, brightly lit feasts, trenches, pitch-black night, the thrust of a sharp knife, noiseless footsteps. . . .

I relaxed, thought about travelling expenses, and sighed.

I conjured up a picture of my future as I lay with closed eyes, but before the night was half over it had vanished. In the gloom I suddenly seemed to see a pile of groceries, then Tzu-chun's ashen face appeared to gaze at me beseechingly with childlike eyes. But as soon as I took a grip on myself, there was nothing there.

However, my heart still felt heavy. Why couldn't I have waited a few days instead of blurting out the truth like that to her? Now she knew all that was left to her was the passionate sternness of her father—who was as heartless as a creditor with his children—and the icy cold looks of bystanders. Apart from this there was only emptiness. How terrible to bear the heavy burden of emptiness, treading out one's life amid sternness and cold looks! And at the end not even a tombstone to your grave!

I shouldn't have told Tzu-chun the truth. Since we had loved each other, I should have gone on lying to her. If truth is a treasure, it shouldn't have proved such a heavy burden of emptiness to Tzu-chun. Of course, lies are empty too, but at least they wouldn't have proved so crushing a burden in the end.

I thought if I told Tzu-chun the truth, she could go forward boldly without scruples, just as when we started living together. But I must have been wrong. Her fearlessness then was owing to love.

I hadn't the courage to shoulder the heavy burden of hypocrisy, so I thrust the burden of the truth onto her. Because she had loved me, she had to bear this

heavy burden, amid sternness and cold glances to the end of her days.

I had thought of her death. . . . I realized I was a weakling. I deserved to be cast out by the strong, no matter whether they were truthful or hypocritical. Yet she, from first to last, had hoped that I could live longer. . . .

I wanted to leave Chichao Street; it was too empty and lonely here. I thought, if once I could get away, it would be as if Tzu-chun were still at my side. Or at least as if she were still in town, and might drop in on me any time, as she had when I lived in the hostel.

However, all my letters went unanswered, as did my applications to friends to find me a post. There was nothing for it but to go to see a family acquaintance I hadn't visited for a long time. This was an old classmate of my uncle's, a highly respected senior licentiate, who had lived in Peking for many years and had a wide circle of acquaintances.

The gatekeeper stared at me scornfully—no doubt because my clothes were shabby—and only with difficulty was I admitted. My uncle's friend still remembered me, but treated me very coldly. He knew all about us.

"Obviously, you can't stay here," he said coldly, after I asked him to recommend me to a job somewhere else. "But where will you go? It's extremely difficult. That—er—that friend of yours, Tzu-chun, I suppose you know, is dead."

I was dumbfounded.

"Are you sure?" I finally blurted out.

He gave an artificial laugh. "Of course I am. My servant Wang Sheng comes from the same village as her family."

"But—how did she die?"

"Who knows? At any rate, she's dead."

I have forgotten how I took my leave and went home. I knew he wouldn't tell a lie. Tzu-chun would never be with me again, as she had last year. Although she wanted to bear the burden of emptiness amid sternness and cold glances till the end of her days, it had been too much for her. Fate had decided that she should die knowing the truth I had told her—die unloved!

Obviously, I could not stay there. But where could I go?

All around was a great void, quiet as death. I seemed to see the darkness before the eyes of every single person who died unloved, and to hear all the bitter and despairing cries of their struggle.

I was waiting for something new, something nameless and unexpected. But day after day passed in the same deadly quiet.

I went out now much less than before, sitting or lying in this great void, allowing this deathly quiet to eat away my soul. Sometimes the silence itself seemed afraid, seemed to recoil. And at such times there would flash up nameless, unexpected, new hope.

One overcast morning, when the sun was unable to struggle out from behind the clouds and the very air was tired, the patter of tiny feet and a snuffling sound made me open my eyes. A glance round the room revealed nothing, but when I looked down I saw a small creature pattering around—thin, covered with dust, more dead than alive. . . .

When I looked harder, my heart missed a beat. I jumped up.

It was Ahsui. He had come back.

I left Chichao Street not just because of the cold glances of my landlord and the maid, but largely on account of Ahsui. However, where could I go? I realized, naturally, there were many ways open to me, and sometimes seemed to see them stretching before me. I didn't know, though, how to take the first step.

After much deliberation, I decided the hostel was the only place where I could put up. Here is the same shabby room as before, the same wooden bed, half dead locust tree and wistaria. But what gave me love and life, hope and happiness before has vanished. There is nothing but emptiness, the empty existence I exchanged for the truth.

There are many ways open to me, and I must take one of them because I am still living. I still don't know, though, how to take the first step. Sometimes the road seems like a great, grey serpent, writhing and darting at me. I wait and wait and watch it approach, but it always disappears suddenly in the darkness.

The early spring nights are as long as ever. I sit idly for a long time and recall a funeral procession I saw on the street this morning. There were paper figures and paper horses in front, and behind crying that sounded like a lilt. I see how clever they are—this is so simple.

Then Tzu-chun's funeral springs to my mind. She bore the heavy burden of emptiness alone, advancing down the long grey road, only to be swallowed up amid sternness and cold glances.

I wish we really had ghosts and there really were a hell. Then, no matter how the wind of hell roared, I would go to find Tzu-chun, to tell her of my remorse and grief, and beg her forgiveness. Otherwise, the

poisonous flames of hell would surround me, and fiercely devour my remorse and grief.

In the whirlwind and flames I would put my arms round Tzu-chun, and ask her pardon, or try to make her happy. . . .

However, this is emptier than the new life. Now there is only the early spring night which is still as long as ever. Since I am living, I must make a fresh start. And the first step is just to describe my remorse and grief, for Tzu-chun's sake as well as for my own.

All I have is crying that sounds like a lilt as I mourn for Tzu-chun, burying her in oblivion.

I want to forget. For my own sake I don't want to remember the oblivion I gave Tzu-chun for her burial.

I must make a fresh start in life. I must hide the truth deep in my wounded heart, and advance silently, taking oblivion and falsehood as my guide. . . .

October 21, 1925

THE DIVORCE

"Ah, Uncle Mu! A happy New Year and good luck to you!"

"How are you, Pa-san? Happy New Year! . . ."

"Happy New Year! So Ai-ku's here as well. . . ."

"Well met, Grandad Mu! . . ."

As Chuang Mu-san and his daughter Ai-ku stepped down into the boat from Magnolia Bridge Wharf a hum of voices broke out on board. Some of the passengers clasped their hands and bowed, and four places were vacated on the benches of the cabin. Calling out greetings, Chuang Mu-san sat down, leaning his long pipe against the side of the boat. Ai-ku sat on his left opposite Pa-san, her scythe-shaped feet fanning out to form a V.

"Going into town, Grandad Mu?" asked a man with a ruddy face like the shell of a crab.

"Not to town." Grandad Mu sounded rather dispirited. But his dark red face was so wrinkled in any case that he looked much the same as usual. "We're making a trip to Pang Village."

All on board stopped talking to stare at them.

"Is it Ai-ku's business again?" asked Pa-san at last.

"It is. . . . This affair will be the death of me. It's dragged on now for three years. We've quarrelled and patched it up time after time; yet still the thing isn't settled. . . ."

"Will you be going to Mr. Wei's house again?"

"That's right. This won't be the first time he's acted as peace-maker; but I've never agreed to his terms. Not that it matters. Their family's having their New Year reunion now. Even Seventh Master from the city will be there. . . ."

"Seventh Master?" Pa-san opened his eyes very wide. "So he'll be there to put his word in too, eh? . . . Well. . . . As a matter of fact, since we pulled down their kitchen range last year we've had our revenge more or less. Besides, there's really no point in Ai-ku going back there. . . ." He lowered his eyes again.

"I'm not set on going back there, brother Pa-san!" Ai-ku looked up indignantly. "I'm doing this to spite them. Just think! Young Beast carried on with that little widow and decided he didn't want me. But is it as simple as that? Old Beast just egged on his son and tried to get rid of me too—as if it were all that easy! What about Seventh Master? Just because he exchanges cards with the magistrate, does that mean he can't talk our language? He can't be such a block-head as Mr. Wei, who says nothing but: 'Separate, better separate.' I'll tell him what I've had to put up with all these years, and we'll see who he says is right!"

Pa-san was convinced, and kept his mouth shut.

The boat was very quiet, with no sound but the splash of water against the bow. Chuang Mu-san reached for his pipe and filled it.

A fat man sitting opposite, next to Pa-san, rummaged in his girdle for a flint and struck a light, while he held to Chuang Mu-san's pipe.

"Thank you, thank you," said Chuang Mu-san, nodding to him.

"Though this is the first time we've met," said the fat man respectfully, "I heard of you long ago. Yes,

who is there in all the eighteen villages by the coast who doesn't know of Uncle Mu? We've known too for some time that Young Shih was carrying on with a little widow. When you took your six sons to tear down their kitchen range last year, who didn't say you were right? . . . All the big gates open for you, you have plenty of face. . . . Why be afraid of them. . . ."

"This uncle is a truly discerning man," said Ai-ku approvingly. "I don't know who he is, though."

"My name is Wang Te-kuei," replied the fat man promptly.

"They can't just push me out! I don't care whether it's Seventh Master or Eighth Master. I'll go on making trouble till their family's ruined and all of them are dead! Mr. Wei has been at me four times, hasn't he? Even dad's been thrown off his balance by the sight of that settlement money. . . ."

Chuang Mu-san swore softly to himself.

"But, Grandad Mu, didn't the Shih family send Mr. Wei a whole feast at the end of last year?" asked Crab-face.

"Makes no difference," said Wang Te-kuei. "Can a feast blind a man completely? If so, what happens when you send him a foreign banquet? Those scholars who know the truth will always stick up for justice. If anyone's bullied by everyone else, for instance, they will up and speak for him no matter whether there's wine to be had or not. At the end of last year, Mr. Yung of our humble village came back from Peking. He's one who has seen the great world, not like us villagers. He said that a Madame Kuang there, who's the best. . . ."

"Wang Jetty!" shouted the boatmen, preparing to moor. "Any passengers for Wang Jetty?"

"Here, me!" Fatty grabbed his pipe, and darted out of the cabin, jumping ashore just as the boat drew in.

"Excuse me!" he called back with a nod to the passengers.

The boat rowed on in fresh silence, broken only by the plash of water. Pa-san began to doze off, facing Ai-ku's scythe-shaped shoes, and his mouth fell open by degrees. The two old women in the front cabin began softly chanting Buddhist prayers and telling their beads. They looked at Ai-ku and exchanged significant glances, pursing their lips and nodding.

Ai-ku was staring at the awning above her, probably considering how best to raise such trouble that Old Beast's family would be ruined and he and Young Beast would have no way to turn. She was not afraid of Mr. Wei. She had seen him twice and he was nothing but a squat, round-headed fellow—there were plenty like him in her own village, only a little darker.

Chuang Mu-san had come to the end of his tobacco, and the oil in the pipe was sputtering, but still he went on puffing. He knew the stop after Wang Jetty was Pang Village. Already, in fact, you could see Literary Star Pavilion at the entrance to the village. He had been here so often it was not worth talking about, any more than Mr. Wei. He remembered how his daughter had come crying home, how badly her husband and father-in-law had behaved, and how they had worsted him. The past unfolded again before his eyes. Usually when he recalled how he had punished the evil-doers, he would give a bleak smile—but not this time. The fat form of Seventh Master had somehow intervened, and was squeezing his thoughts out of any semblance of order.

The boat went on in continued silence. Only the Buddhist prayers swelled in volume. Everyone else seemed sunk in thought like Ai-ku and her father.

"Here you are, Uncle Mu. Pang Village."

Roused by the boatman's voice, they looked up to see Literary Star Pavilion before them.

Chuang jumped ashore, and Ai-ku followed him. They passed the pavilion and headed for Mr. Wei's house. After passing thirty houses on their way south, they turned a corner and reached their destination. Four boats with black awnings were moored in a row at the gate.

As they stepped through the great, black-lacquered gate, they were asked into the gatehouse. It was full of boatmen and farm-hands, who were seated at two tables. Ai-ku dared not stare at them, but she took one hasty look round, and saw there was not a sign of Old Beast and Young Beast.

When a servant brought in soup containing sweet New Year cakes, without knowing why, she felt even more uncomfortable and uneasy. "Just because he exchanges cards with the magistrate doesn't mean he can't talk our language, does it?" she thought. "These scholars who know the truth will always stick up for justice. I must tell Seventh Master the whole story, beginning from the time I married at the age of fifteen. . . ."

When she finished the soup, she knew the time was at hand. Sure enough, before long she found herself following one of the farm-hands, who ushered her and her father across the great hall, and round a corner into the reception room.

The room was so crammed with things she could not take in all it contained. There were many guests as well, whose short jackets of red and blue satin were shimmering all around her. And in the midst of them was a man whom she knew at once must be Seventh Master. Though he had a round head and a round face too, he was a great deal bigger than Mr. Wei

and the others. He had narrow slits of eyes in his great round face, and a wispy black moustache; and though he was bald his head and face were ruddy and glistening. Ai-ku was quite puzzled for a moment, then concluded he must have rubbed his skin with lard.

"This is an anus-stop,* which the ancients used in burials."

Seventh Master was holding something which looked like a corroded stone, and he rubbed his nose twice with this object as he spoke. "Unfortunately, it comes from a recent digging. Still, it's worth having: it can't be later than Han.** Look at this 'mercury stain'. . . ."***

The "mercury stain" was at once surrounded by several heads, one of which, of course, was Mr. Wei's. There were several sons of the house as well, whom Ai-ku had not yet noticed, for so awed were they by Seventh Master that they looked like flattened bed-bugs.

She did not understand all he had just said; she was not interested in this "mercury stain," nor did she dare investigate it; so she took this chance instead of looking round. Standing behind her by the wall, close to the door, were both Old Beast and Young Beast. She saw at a glance that they looked older than when she had met them by chance half a year ago.

* It was the custom for small pieces of jade to be inserted in a dead man's orifices, for people believed this prevented the corpse from decaying.

** The Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.).

*** The jade and metal objects found in tombs are often stained with mercury, which was placed in corpses to prevent them from decaying too rapidly.

Then everybody drifted away from the "mercury stain." Mr. Wei took the anus-stop and sat down to stroke it, turning to ask Chuang Mu-san:

"Did just the two of you come?"

"Just the two of us."

"Why have none of your sons come?"

"They hadn't time."

"We wouldn't have troubled you to come at New Year, if not for this business . . . I'm sure you've had enough of it yourself. It's over two years now, isn't it? Better to remove enmity than keep it, I say. Since Ai-ku's husband didn't get on with her, and his parents didn't like her . . . better take the advice I gave you before and let them separate. I haven't enough face to convince you. But Seventh Master, you know, is a champion of justice. And Seventh Master's view is the same as mine. However, he says both sides must make some concessions, and he's told the Shih family to add another ten dollars to the settlement, making it ninety dollars!"

" . . . "

"Ninety dollars! If you took the case right up to the emperor, you couldn't get such favourable terms. Nobody but Seventh Master would make such a handsome offer!"

Seventh Master widened his slits of eyes to nod at Chuang Mu-san.

Ai-ku saw that the situation was critical and marvelled that her father, of whom all the coastal families stood in awe, should have not a word to say for himself here. This was quite uncalled for, she thought. Although she could not follow all Seventh Master said, he somehow struck her as a kindly old soul, not nearly as frightening as she had imagined.

"Seventh Master's a scholar who knows the truth," she said boldly. "He's not like us country folk. I had

no one to complain to of all the wrong that's been done me; but now I'll tell Seventh Master. All the time I was married I tried to be a good wife—I bowed my head as I went in and out, and I didn't fail in a single wifely duty. But they kept finding fault with me—each one was a regular bully. That year the weasel killed that big cock, how could they blame me for not closing the coop? It was that mangy cur—curse it!—who pushed open the door of the coop to steal some rice mixed with husks. But that Young Beast wouldn't distinguish black from white. He gave me a slap on the cheek. . . .”

Seventh Master looked at her.

“I knew there must be a reason. This is something Seventh Master will not fail to notice, for scholars who know the truth know everything. He was bewitched by that bitch, and wanted to drive me away! I married him with the proper ceremonies—three lots of tea and six presents—and was carried to his house in a bridal sedan! Is it so easy for him to toss me aside? . . . I mean to show them, I don't mind going to court. If it can't be settled at the district court, we'll go to the prefecture. . . .”

“Seventh Master knows all this,” said Mr. Wei, looking up. “If you persist in this attitude, Ai-ku, it won't be to your advantage. You haven't changed in the least. Look, how sensible your father is! It's a pity you and your brothers aren't like him. Suppose you do take this matter to the prefect, won't he consult Seventh Master? But then the case will be dealt with publicly, and nobody's feelings will be spared. . . . That being so. . . .”

“I'll stake my life if need be, even if it ruins both families!”

“There's no need for such desperate measures,” put in Seventh Master slowly. “You're still young. We

should all keep the peace. 'Peace breeds wealth.' Isn't that true? I've added a whole ten dollars: that's more than generous. For if your father-in-law and mother-in-law say 'Go!', then go you must. Don't talk about the prefecture, this would be the same in Shanghai, Peking or even abroad. If you don't believe me, ask *him*! He's just come back from the foreign school in Peking." He turned towards a sharp-chinned son of the house. "Isn't that so?" he asked.

"Ab-so-lutely." Sharp-chin hastily straightened up to answer in low, respectful tones.

Ai-ku felt completely isolated. Her father refused to speak, her brothers had not dared come, Mr. Wei had always been on the other side, and now Seventh Master had failed her, while even this young sharp-chin, with his soft talk and air of a flattened bug, was simply saying what was expected of him. But confused as she was, she resolved to make a last stand.

"What, does even Seventh Master. . . ." Her eyes showed surprise and disappointment. "Yes . . . I know, we rough folk are ignorant. My father's to blame for not even understanding how to deal with people—he's lost his old wits completely. He let Old Beast and Young Beast have their way in everything. They stoop to every means, however foul, to fawn on those above them. . . ."

"Look at her, Seventh Master!" Young Beast, who had been standing silently behind her, suddenly spoke up now. "She dares act like this even in Seventh Master's presence. At home she gave us simply no peace at all. She calls my father Old Beast and me Young Beast or Bastard."

"Who the devil is calling you a bastard?" Ai-ku rounded on him fiercely, then turned back to Seventh Master. "I've something else I'd like to say in public.

He was always mean to me. It was 'slut' and 'bitch' all the time. After he started carrying on with that whore, he even cursed my ancestors. Judge between us, Seventh Master. . . ."

She gave a start, and the words died on her lips, for suddenly Seventh Master rolled his eyes and lifted his round face. From the mouth framed by that wispy moustache issued a shrill, trailing cry:

"Come here! . . ."

Her heart, which had missed a beat, suddenly started pounding. The battle was lost, the tables were turned it seemed. She had taken a false step and fallen into the water, and she knew it was all her own fault.

A man in a blue gown and black jacket promptly came in, and stood like a stick with his arms at his side in front of Seventh Master.

There was not a cheep in the room. Seventh Master moved his lips, but nobody could hear what he was saying. Only his servant heard, and the force of this order entered his very marrows, for twice he twitched as if overcome by awe. And he answered:

"Very good, sir."

Then he backed away several paces, turned and went out.

Ai-ku knew that something unexpected and completely unforeseen was about to happen—something which she was powerless to prevent. Only now did she realize the full power of Seventh Master. She had been mistaken before, and acted too rashly and rudely. She repented bitterly, and found herself saying:

"I always meant to accept Seventh Master's decision. . . ."

There was not a cheep in the room. Although her words were as soft as strands of silk, they carried like a thunder-clap to Mr. Wei.

"Good!" he exclaimed approvingly, leaping up. "Seventh Master is truly just, and Ai-ku is truly reasonable. In that case, Mu-san, you can't have any objection, since your daughter's consented herself. I'm sure you've brought the wedding certificates as I asked you. So let both sides produce them now. . . ."

Ai-ku saw her father fumble in his girdle for something. The stick-like servant came in again to hand Seventh Master a small, flat, jet-black object shaped like a tortoise. Ai-ku was afraid something dreadful was going to happen. She darted a look at her father; but he was opening a blue cloth package at the table, and taking out silver dollars.

Seventh Master removed the tortoise's head, poured something from its body into his palm, then returned the flat-looking object to the stick-like servant. He rubbed one finger in his palm, then stuffed it up each nostril, staining his nose and upper lip a bright yellow. Then he wrinkled his nose as if about to sneeze.

Chuang Mu-san was counting the silver dollars. Mr. Wei extracted a few from a pile which had not been counted, and handed them to Old Beast. He also changed the position of the red and green certificates, restoring them to their original owners.

"Put them away," he said. "You must see if the amount is correct Mu-san. This is no joking matter—all this silver. . . ."

"Ah-tchew!"

Though Ai-ku knew it was only Seventh Master sneezing, she could not help turning to look at him. His mouth was wide open and his nose was twitching. In two fingers he was still clutching the small object "used by the ancients in burials." Indeed, he was rubbing the side of his nose with it.

With some difficulty Chuang Mu-san finished counting the money, and both sides put away the red and

green certificates. Then they all seemed to draw themselves up, and tense expressions relaxed. Complete harmony prevailed.

"Good! This business has been settled satisfactorily," said Mr. Wei. Seeing that they looked on the point of leaving, he breathed a sigh of relief. "Well, there's nothing more to be done now. Congratulations on unravelling this knot! Must you be going? Won't you stay to share our New Year feast? This is a rare occasion."

"We mustn't stay," said Ai-ku. "We'll come to drink with you next year."

"Thank you, Mr. Wei. We won't drink just now. We have other business. . . ." Chuang Mu-san, Old Beast and Young Beast withdrew most respectfully.

"What? Not a drop before you go?" Mr. Wei looked at Ai-ku who brought up the rear.

"Really we mustn't. Thank you, Mr. Wei."

November 6, 1925

THE FLIGHT TO THE MOON

I

Intelligent beasts do know what men are thinking. As soon as their house came in sight the horse slowed down and, hanging its head at the same time as its master, plodded as heavily as a pestle pounding rice.

The mansion was overhung with evening mist, and thick black smoke rose from all the neighbours' chimneys, for it was time for supper. Hearing the horse's hoof-beats, retainers had come out to welcome him and were standing erect with their arms at their sides in front of the door. As Yi* dismounted languidly beside the dust heap, they stepped forward to take over his reins and whip. When he set foot on the threshold of the great gate, looked down at the quiverful of brand-new arrows at his waist and the three crows and one shattered sparrow in his bag, he felt the most dreadful misgivings. But he strode in, putting a bold face on things, his arrows rattling in his quiver.

Reaching the inner courtyard, he saw Chang-ngo looking out from the round window. She was so sharp-sighted she was sure to have seen the crows. This gave him such a turn that he came to a sudden stop—but he had to go on in. The serving-maids came out to greet him, unfastened his bow and arrows

* A famous archer hero in ancient Chinese legends.

and undid his game bag. He sensed that they were smiling nervously.

"Madame! . . ." he called as he walked to his wife's room, after he had wiped his face and hands.

Chang-ngo had been watching the sunset through the round window. She turned slowly and threw him a casual glance, but did not speak to him.

He had been used to this treatment for some time, for over a year at least. But as usual he went on in, and sat down on the old, worn leopard skin over the wooden couch opposite her. Scratching his head, he muttered:

"I was unlucky again today: I found nothing but crows. . . ."

"Pah!"

Raising her willowy eyebrows, Chang-ngo suddenly stood up and swept from the room, complaining as she went: "Noodles with crow sauce again! Noodles with crow sauce again! I'd like to know who else eats nothing but noodles with crow sauce from one year to the next? How unlucky I was to marry you, and eat noodles with crow sauce all the year round!"

"Madame!" Yi sprang to his feet and followed her. "Still, it wasn't so bad today," he continued softly. "I shot a sparrow too, which you can have cooked. Nuhsin!" He called to the maid: "Bring that sparrow to show your mistress."

The game had been taken to the kitchen, but Nuhsin ran over to pick out the sparrow and brought it in both hands to Chang-ngo.

"Oh." She glanced at it, and pinched it slowly with two fingers.

"How disgusting!" she said crossly. "It's all in pieces! Where's the meat?"

"Yes, it's shot to pieces." Yi had lost his nerve. *"My bow is too powerful, and my arrow-heads are too large."*

"Can't you use smaller arrow-heads?"

"I haven't any. Ever since I shot the giant boar and the huge python. . . ."

"Is this a giant boar or a huge python?" She turned to Nu-hsin and ordered: "Serve a bowl of soup!" Then she went back to her room.

Left alone at a loss in the hall, Yi sat down with his back to the wall to listen to the crackling of firewood in the kitchen. He remembered how big the giant boar had been — it had loomed like a small hillock in the distance. If he hadn't killed it then but left it till now, it would have kept them in meat for half a year and spared them all this worry about food each day. As for the huge python, it could have made soup. . . .

Nu-yi came in to light the lamp, and its faint rays lit up the vermilion bow and arrows, the black bow and arrows, the crossbow, the sword and the dagger hanging on the opposite wall. After one look, Yi lowered his head and sighed. Then Nu-hsin brought in the supper and set it on the table in the middle: five large bowls of noodles on the left, two large bowls of noodles and one of soup on the right, in the centre one large bowl of sauce made of crows' meat.

While eating, Yi admitted to himself that the noodles were most unappetizing, and stole a glance at Chang-ngo. Without so much as looking at the sauce, she had steeped her noodles in soup, and she set down her bowl half finished. Her face struck him as paler and thinner than before, and he feared she must be ill.

By the second watch she seemed in a better mood, and sat silently on the edge of the bed to drink some water. Yi sat up on the wooden couch next to her, stroking the old leopard skin which was losing its fur.

"Ah," he said in a conciliatory tone. "I bagged this spotted leopard on the Western Hills before we married. It was a lovely sight—golden and glossy all over."

That reminded him of their diet in those days. They ate only the four paws of the bear, only the hump of the camel, giving all the rest to the serving-maids and retainers. When all the big game was finished they ate wild boars, rabbits and pheasants; and because he was such a good marksman he could shoot as many as he pleased.

A sigh escaped him.

"The fact is I'm too good a shot," he said. "That's why the whole place is cleaned out. Who could have guessed we'd be left with nothing but crows? . . ."

Chang-ngo gave a faint smile.

"Today should be counted as lucky." Yi felt more cheerful too. "At least I caught a sparrow. I had to go an extra ten miles to find it."

"Can't you go a little further still?"

"Yes, madame. That's what I mean to do. I'll get up earlier tomorrow. If you wake early, call me. I mean to go nearly twenty miles further, and see if I can't find any roebucks or rabbits. . . . It won't be easy, though. When I shot the giant boar and the huge python, there was so much game. Do you remember all the black bears that used to pass my mother-in-law's door, and how she asked me several times to shoot them? . . ."

"Yes?" Chang-ngo seemed to have forgotten.

"Who could have guessed they would all disappear like this? Come to think of it, I really don't know how we're going to manage in future. I'm all right. I've only to eat that elixir the Taoist gave me, and I can fly up to heaven. But I must think of you first . . . that's why I've decided to go a little further tomorrow. . . ."

"Umm."

Chang-ngo had finished the water. She lay down slowly and closed her eyes.

The sinking light lit up her neglected make-up. Much of her powder had gone, the skin beneath her eyes looked darker, and the paint on her eyebrows didn't seem to match; still her mouth was as red as fire, and although she wasn't smiling you could see the faintest dimple on either cheek.

"Ahh! How can I give a woman like this nothing but crow sauce noodles all the year round?"

Yi was ashamed to think of it: even his cheeks and ears began to burn.

II

Night passed and a new day dawned.

When Yi opened his eyes and saw a sunbeam aslant the western wall, he knew it could not be early. He looked at Chang-ngo, who was lying with outstretched arms fast asleep. Then he quietly dressed himself, slipped down from his leopard skin couch, tiptoed into the hall, and as he washed his face told Nu-keng to order Wang Sheng to saddle his horse.

Because he was so busy, he had long since abolished breakfast. Nu-yi put five baked cakes, five leeks and a package of paprika sauce in his game bag, and fastened this firmly to his waist with his bow and arrows. He tightened his belt and strode lightly out of the hall, and spoke to Nu-keng, who was just coming in:

"I mean to go further today to look for game, and I may be a little late back. When your mistress has woken and had her breakfast and seems to be in good spirits, tell her I'm very sorry but I hope she'll wait

for supper with me. Don't forget! Tell her I'm very sorry."

He walked swiftly out, swung into the saddle, and flashed past the retainers ranged on each side. Very soon he had galloped out of the village. In front were the *kaoliang* fields through which he passed every day. He paid no attention to them, having learned long ago that there was nothing here. With two cracks of his whip he galloped forward, and covered about twenty miles without a pause. In front was a dense forest, and since his horse was panting for breath and covered with sweat it naturally slowed down. After three or four more miles they reached the forest, where nothing could he see but wasps, butterflies, ants and grasshoppers — not a trace of game. At first sight of this new place, he had expected to bag a fox or rabbit at least; but now he realized that had been an idle dream. He made his way out, and saw another stretch of green *kaoliang* fields ahead, with one or two mud cottages in the distance. The breeze was balmy, the sun was bright, and not a bird could be heard.

"Confound it all!" He bellowed to vent his feelings.

After a few more paces forward, however, his heart leapt up; for on the flat ground outside a mud hut in the distance there actually was a fowl. Pecking at the ground at each step, it looked like a large pigeon. He seized his bow and fitted an arrow to it, drew it to its full extent, then let it go, and his arrow sped through the air like a shooting star.

He never missed his quarry, there could be no question of that. All he had to do was spur his horse after the arrow, and he could retrieve the game. But just as he approached it, an old woman picked up the large pigeon transfixed by his arrow and hurried, shouting, towards him.

"Who are you? Why have you shot my best black laying hen? Have you nothing better to do? . . ."

Yi's heart gave a sudden jolt, and he pulled up short.

"What! A hen?" he asked nervously. "I thought it was a quail."

"Are you blind! You must be over forty too."

"Yes, ma'am. I was forty-five last year."

"So old and still such a fool! You could even mistake a mother hen for a cuckoo! Who are you anyway?"

"I am Yi Yi." While saying this he noticed that his arrow had pierced the hen's heart, so of course it was dead; hence his voice trailed away on his name as he dismounted.

"Yi Yi? . . . Never heard of him!" She peered into his face.

"Some people would know me at once. In the days of good king Yao I shot several wild boars and pythons. . . ."

"Oh, you liar! His Honour Feng Meng* and some other men shot those together. Maybe you were one of them; but how can you claim you did it all yourself? For shame!"

"Really, ma'am! That fellow Feng Meng has just taken to calling on me during the last few years; we never worked together. He had nothing to do with it."

"Liar. Everybody says so. I hear it four or five times a month."

"All right. Let's talk business. What about this hen?"

"You must make it up! This was my best laying hen: she laid an egg a day. You must give me two hoes and three spindles."

* Traditionally believed to be Yi's pupil.

"Look at me, ma'am — I'm not a farmer or spinner. Where would I get hoes or spindles? I've no money on me either, only five baked cakes, but they're of the finest flour. I'll give you these for your hen, with five leeks into the bargain and a package of paprika sauce. What do you say? . . ."

Taking the cakes from his bag with one hand, he picked up the hen with the other.

The old woman was not averse to taking these cakes of the finest flour, but insisted on having fifteen. After haggling for some time they fixed on ten, and Yi agreed to send the rest over by tomorrow noon at the latest, leaving his arrow there as security. Only then did he feel reassured. He stuffed the dead hen in his bag, sprang to his saddle and headed home. Though famished, he was happy. It was actually over a year since they last tasted chicken soup.

It was afternoon when he emerged from the forest, and whipped his horse to gallop home. The beast was exhausted, though, and not till dusk did they reach the familiar *kaoliang* fields. A shadowy figure flashed into sight some way off, and an arrow sang through the air.

Not curbing his horse but letting it jog along, Yi fitted an arrow to his bow and shot. A clash was heard as two arrow-heads collided, and sparks flew into the air; then the two shafts thrust up like an inverted V, toppled over and fell to the ground. No sooner had the first arrows met than the two men loosed their second, which collided again in mid-air. They shot nine arrows like this, till Yi's supply was exhausted; but he could see Feng Meng gloating opposite, with another arrow on the bow-string aimed at his throat.

"Aha!" thought Yi. "I imagined he'd gone to the seaside to catch fish, but he's been hanging round all

this time playing tricks like this. I'm not surprised, then, at what the old woman said. . . ."

In a flash the other's bow arched like a full moon, and whistling through the air the arrow whizzed towards Yi's throat. Perhaps its aim was at fault, for it struck him full in the mouth. He tumbled over, transfixed, and fell to the ground. His horse stood motionless.

Seeing Yi was dead, Feng Meng strode slowly over. Smiling as if drinking to his victory, he gazed at the corpse's face.

He was gazing long and hard, when Yi opened his eyes and sat up.

"You've come for nothing a hundred times or more." He spat out the arrow and laughed. "Don't you know the skill I have in 'biting the arrow'? This won't get you anywhere. These tricks of yours won't do. You can't kill your boxing master with strokes you've learned from him. You must work something out on your own."

"I was only paying you out in your own coin" the victor mumbled.

Yi stood up, roaring with laughter. "You're always quoting some adage. But you can only impress old women that way. You can't impose on me. I've always stuck to hunting, never taken to hold-ups like you. . . ."

Looking at the hen in his bag, he was relieved to see it had not been crushed. He swung into his saddle and rode away.

"Curse you! . . ." Oaths carried after him.

"I never thought he would sink to this. . . . Such a young fellow, and yet he's learned to swear. No wonder that old woman was taken in."

Yi shook his head sadly as he rode along.

III

Before he came to the end of the *kaoliang* fields, night fell. Stars twinkled in the sky, and the evening star shone with unusual brilliance in the west. The horse picked its way along the white ridges between the fields, going slower than ever because it was worn out. Fortunately, at the horizon the moon began to shed its silver light.

"Confound it!" Hearing his belly rumble, Yi lost patience. The busier I am trying to make a living, the more irritating things I run into, wasting my time!" He pressed his knees against the horse's flanks to urge it on; but the beast simply twitched its rump and jogged on as slowly as ever.

"Chang-ngo is sure to be angry, it's so late," he thought. "She may fly into a temper. Thank goodness I've this little hen to make her happy. I'll tell her: 'Madame, I went over sixty miles there and back to find you this.' No, that's no good: sounds too boastful."

In his joy at seeing lights ahead, he stopped worrying. And without any urging the horse broke into a canter. A round, snow-white moon lit up the path ahead, and a cool wind soothed his cheeks—it was better than coming home from a great hunt!

The horse stopped instinctively beside the dust heap. Yi was taken aback to see everything in confusion. And Chao Fu alone came to meet him.

"What's up? Where's Wang Sheng?" he demanded, much surprised.

"Wang Sheng has gone to the Yao family to look for the mistress."

"What? Has your mistress gone to the Yao family?" Yi sat stupidly in his saddle.

"Yes, sir." While replying, Chao took the reins and whip.

Yi dismounted and crossed the threshold. After a moment's thought he turned to ask:

"Are you sure she didn't grow tired of waiting and go to a restaurant?"

"No, sir. I've asked in all three restaurants. She isn't there."

Yi lowered his head to think as he walked inside. The three maids stood nervously together in front of the hall. Amazed, he demanded loudly:

"What! All of you here? Your mistress never goes to the Yao family alone!"

They looked at him in silence, then took off his bow sheath and quiver and the bag containing the hen. Yi suddenly started to panic. Suppose Chang-ngo had killed herself in anger? He sent Nu-keng for Chao Fu, and told him to search the pond in the back yard and the trees. As soon as he went inside, though, he knew his guess had been wrong. The room was in great disorder, the chests of clothes had been opened, and the moment he looked at the other side of the bed, he realized that the jewel case was missing. He felt as if doused with cold water. Of course, gold and pearls were nothing; but the elixir given him by that Taoist had been kept in that jewel box.

After walking round twice in a circle, Yi noticed Wang Sheng at the door.

"Please, sir," reported Wang Sheng, "our mistress is not with the Yao family. They're not playing mah-jong today."

Yi looked at him and said nothing. Wang Sheng withdrew.

"Did you call me, sir?" Chao Fu asked, coming in. Yi shook his head and waved him away.

He described several circles in his room, walked to the end of the hall and sat down. Looking up he could see on the opposite wall the vermilion bow and arrows, the black bow and arrows, the crossbow, the sword and the dagger. After thinking for some time, he asked the maids who were standing woodenly there:

"What time did your mistress disappear?"

"She wasn't here when I brought in the lamp," said Nu-yi. "But no one saw her go out."

"Did you see her eat the medicine from that case?"

"No, sir. But she did ask me for some water to drink this afternoon."

Yi stood up in dismay. He suspected he had been left alone on earth!

"Did you see anything flying to heaven?" he asked.

"Oh!" exclaimed Nu-hsin suddenly after some thought. "When I came out after lighting the lamp, I did see a black shadow flying this way; but I never dreamed it was our mistress. . . ." Her face turned pale.

"It must have been!" Yi clapped his knee and sprang up. On his way outside he turned back to ask Nu-hsin: "Which way did she go?"

Nu-hsin pointed with one finger, and all he could see when he looked in that direction was the round, snow-white moon suspended in the sky, with its hazy pavilions and trees. While he was a child his grandmother had told him how lovely the moon palace was; he still had a vague recollection of her description. As he watched the moon floating in a sapphire sea, he felt unusually conscious of his own weight.

Suddenly he grew angry. And this anger turned into the urge to kill. With dilated eyes, he shouted to the maids:

"Bring me the bow with which I shot the sun! And three arrows!"

Nu-yi and Nu-keng brought a huge bow from the middle of the hall, dusted it, and handed it to him with three long arrows.

Holding the bow in one hand he grasped the three arrows in the other, fitted them all to the string, drew the bow to the full and pointed it at the moon. He stood there firm as a rock, his eyes darting lightning. His hair, flying in the wind, resembled black fire. For one instant he looked like the hero who had long ago shot the sun.

A whistling was heard — just one — as three shafts left the string together, one after the other, too fast for eye to see or ear to hear. The three shafts should have struck the moon in one and the same place, for they followed each other without so much as a hair's breadth between them. But to be sure of hitting he had varied his aim a little, so that the arrows would strike three different places and make three wounds.

The maids gave a cry. They saw the moon quiver and thought it must surely fall — but still it hung there peacefully, shedding a calm, even brighter light, as if completely unscathed.

Yi threw back his head to hurl an oath at the sky, then watched and waited. But the moon paid no attention. He took three paces forward, and the moon fell back three paces. He took three paces back, and the moon moved forward again.

They looked at each other in silence.

Yi listlessly leant his bow against the door of the hall, and went inside. The three maids followed him.

He sat down and heaved a sigh. "Well, your mistress will be happy all on her own for ever after. How could she have the heart to leave me and fly up there alone? Could she have felt me too old? But only last month she said: 'You're not old. It shows mental weakness to think of yourself as old. . . .'"

"That couldn't be the reason," said Nu-yi. "Some folk still describe you as a warrior, sir."

"Sometimes you really seem like an artist," put in Nu-hsin.

"What nonsense! But the truth is, those crow sauce noodles were really uneatable. I can't blame her for not being able to stomach them. . . ."

"I'll cut a piece of the leg facing the wall to mend that leopard skin where it's worn out. It looks rather bad." Nu-hsin walked inside.

"Wait a bit," said Yi, and reflected. "There's no hurry for that. I'm famished. Look smart and cook me a dish of chicken with paprika, and bake five cat-ties of cake; then I shall go to bed. Tomorrow I'm going to look for that Taoist to ask him for another elixir, so that I can follow her. Tell Wang Sheng, Nu-keng, to give my horse four pints of beans!"

December 1926

FORGING THE SWORD

I

Mei Chien Chih* had no sooner lain down to sleep beside his mother than rats, coming out to gnaw at the wooden lid of the pan, got on his nerves. He gave a few soft hoots, which had some effect to begin with, but later the rats simply ignored him, crunching and munching as they pleased. And he dared not make a lot of noise to drive them away, for fear of waking his mother who had so tired herself out during the day that she fell asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow.

After a long time things quietened down. He was about to sleep, when a sudden splash made him open his eyes again. At the same time he heard the rasping of claws scrabbling against earthenware.

"Good! Devil take you!" he thought. Delighted, he sat up quietly.

He got down from the bed, and picked his way by the light of the moon to behind the door, where he groped for the fire stick, lit a chip of pine wood and lighted up the water container. Sure enough, a huge rat had fallen in. But since there was not much water left, it could not get out, and was just circling round, scrabbling at the side of the cistern.

* The story of how Mei Chien Chih revenged himself on the king of Chu was recorded as early as the Spring and Autumn Period (722-481 B.C.).

"Serves you right!" When he thought that these were the creatures that gnawed the furniture every night and kept him awake with their noise, he was very pleased. He stuck the torch into a small hole in the mud wall, to enjoy the sight; but presently he was so revolted by its beady eyes, he reached for a dried reed and pushed the creature under the water. After a time he removed the reed and the rat, floating up, went on circling round and scrabbling at the side of the cistern again. Only it clutched less powerfully than before, and its eyes were under water—all that could be seen was the red tip of its small pointed nose, snuffling desperately.

Recently he had felt considerable dislike for red-nosed people. Yet now the sight of this small, pointed red nose struck him as pathetic, so he took the reed again and thrust it under the rat's belly. The rat clutched at it, and after recovering its breath clambered up it. When its whole body could be seen — sopping black fur, bloated belly, worm-like tail — it struck him again as disgusting and beastly, and he hastily shook the reed, so that the rat dropped back with a splash into the cistern. He hit it several times over the head with the reed, to make it sink.

When the pine chip had been changed six times, the rat could no longer stir, and was just floating submerged in the middle of the jar, from time to time straining slightly towards the surface of the water. Once more Mei Chien Chih was seized with pity. He broke the stick in two, and with considerable difficulty fished the creature up and put it on the floor. To begin with, the rat didn't budge, then it took a breath; after a long time its four feet twitched and it turned over, as if wanting to stand up and make off. This gave Mei Chien Chih a turn, and without thinking he raised his left foot and brought it heavily down.

There was a squelching sound. When he squatted down to look, there was fresh blood at the corner of the rat's mouth — it was probably dead.

He felt very sorry for it again, and as miserable as if he had done something really criminal. He squatted there, staring, unable to get up.

By this time his mother was awake.

"What are you doing, son?" she asked from the bed.

"A rat. . . ." He got hastily to his feet and turned round, answering briefly.

"A rat, yes. I know. But what are you doing? Killing it, or saving it?"

He made no answer. The torch had burnt out. He stood there silently in the darkness, accustoming his eyes to the pale light of the moon.

His mother sighed.

"After midnight you'll be sixteen, but you're still so soft. You don't change at all. It looks as if your father will have no one to avenge him."

Sitting in the grey moonlight his mother seemed to be trembling all over, and in her low tones was such infinite grief, it made him shiver. The next moment he felt hot blood racing through his body.

"Avenge father? Does he need avenging?" he demanded in amazement, stepping forward.

"He does. And you must do it. I wanted to tell you long ago, but you were too small, so I said nothing. Now you're not a child any more, yet you still act like one. I just don't know what to do. How can a boy like you carry off a real man's job?"

"I can. Tell me, mother. I'm going to change. . . ."

"Of course. I can only tell you. And you'll have to change. . . . Well, come over here."

He walked over. His mother was sitting stiffly on the bed, her eyes flashing in the shadowy white moonlight.

"Listen!" she said gravely. "Your father was famed for the swords he forged—he was the best smith in the land. I've sold all his tools to keep us from starving, so there's nothing left for you to see. But he was the best sword maker in the whole world. Twenty years ago, the king's concubine gave birth to a piece of iron. They said she conceived after embracing an iron pillar. It was pure, transparent iron. The king realized this was a rare treasure, and decided to have it made into a sword with which he could defend his kingdom, kill his enemies and safeguard himself. As ill luck would have it, your father was chosen for the task, and he brought the iron home. He tempered it day and night for three whole years, until he had forged two swords.

"The day that he opened his furnace for the last time, a most frightening thing happened! A column of white vapour billowed into the air, and the earth shook. The white vapour changed into a white cloud which covered this spot, then gradually turned a deep red and cast a rosy light over everything. In our pitch black furnace lay two red-hot swords. As your father sprinkled them slowly with clear well water, the swords hissed and spat, and gradually turned blue. After this had gone on for seven days and seven nights, the swords disappeared. Only if you looked carefully could you see that they were still in the furnace, pure and transparent as two icicles.

"A look of great happiness flashed from your father's eyes. He picked up the swords and stroked them again and again. Then lines of sadness appeared on his forehead and at the corners of his mouth. He put the swords in two caskets.

"'You've only to look at the portents there have been the last few days, to realize that everybody must know the swords are forged,' he told me softly.

"Tomorrow I must go to present a sword to the king. But the day that I present it will be the last day of my life. I'm afraid we shall never meet again."

"Horried, I wasn't sure what he meant, and didn't know what to say. 'You've done this work so well,' was all I found to murmur.

"'Ah! You don't understand!' he exclaimed. 'The king has always been very suspicious and cruel. Now I've forged him a sword the equal of which has never been seen; he's bound to kill me, so that I can never forge one for anyone else to come and rival him or surpass him.'

"I shed tears.

"'You mustn't be unhappy,' he said. 'There's no way out of this. Tears can't wash away fate. I've been preparing for this for a long time.' His eyes seemed to dart lightning, as he placed a casket with one of the swords in it on my knee. 'This is one of the pair,' he told me. 'You keep it. Tomorrow I shall take its fellow to present to the king. If I don't come back, you'll know I'm dead. Won't you be brought to bed in four or five months? Don't be unhappy, but bear our child and bring him up well. As soon as he's grown up, give him this sword, and tell him to cut off the king's head with it, to avenge me!'"

"Did my father come back that day?" demanded the boy hastily.

"He did not!" she replied calmly. "I asked everywhere, but there was no news of him. Later someone told me that the first to stain with his blood the sword forged by your father was your father himself. For fear his ghost should haunt the palace, they buried his body at the front gate and his head in the back garden!"

Mei Chien Chih's whole body seemed burnt by a fierce fire, and he felt there must be sparks flashing

from every hair on his head. He clenched his fists in the dark till the knuckles cracked.

His mother stood up, and lifted aside the board at the head of the bed. Then she lit a torch, took a hoe from behind the door and handed it to her son, saying "Dig!"

The lad's heart was pounding, but he dug calmly away, stroke after stroke. He scooped out brown earth till he had dug down over five feet, when the colour of the earth changed, as if there were some rotten wood in it.

"Look! Careful now!" exclaimed his mother.

Mei Chien Chih crouched beside the hole he had made, and stretched down his hand. Very gingerly he shifted the rotted wood until the tip of his finger touched something as cold as ice; and the pure, transparent sword appeared. He made out where the hilt was, grasped it, and lifted it out.

The moon and stars outside the window and the pine torch inside the room suddenly seemed to lose their brightness, and the world to be filled with a steely light. And in this steely light the sword dissolved and apparently disappeared. But when the lad looked closely he saw something over five feet long, which didn't look particularly sharp—in fact the blade was rounded like a leek.

"You've got to stop being soft now," said his mother, "and take this sword to avenge your father!"

"I've already stopped being soft. I'll take this sword to avenge my father!"

"I hope so. You'd better put on a blue coat, and strap the sword to your back. With coat and sword the same colour, nobody'll be able to see it. I've already got the coat ready for you here." His mother pointed at the shabby chest behind the bed. "Tomorrow you can set out. Don't worry about me."

Mei Chien Chih took out the new coat and found, when he tried it on, that it fitted him perfectly. Then he folded it up again, wrapped up the sword, placed it by his pillow, and lay down calmly. He believed he had already stopped being soft. He determined to act as if he had nothing on his mind, to fall straight asleep, and to wake the next morning looking as usual, then set out confidently to find his mortal enemy.

However, he couldn't sleep. He tossed and turned, and kept wanting to sit up. He heard his mother's long, soft, hopeless sighs. Then he heard the first crow of the cock and knew that a new day had come, and he was sixteen.

II

When Mei Chien Chih crossed the threshold without a look behind, there was as yet no light in the east. His eyes swollen, dressed in the blue coat with the sword on his back, he strode swiftly toward the city. The night air still hid in the dew that clung to the tips of the leaves in the pine wood. But by the time he reached the other end of the forest, the dew drops were sparkling brightly, and dawn had broken. Far ahead he could just see the outline of the dark grey, crenellated walls of the city.

Mingling with the vegetable vendors, he entered the city gate, finding the streets already full of bustle and activity. Men were standing about idly in groups, while every now and then women looked out from their doors. Most of their eyes were still swollen from sleep too, their hair was uncombed, and their faces were pale as they had had no time to put on rouge.

Mei Chien Chih sensed that something big was about to happen, something which all these people were eagerly yet patiently awaiting.

As he advanced, a child darted over and almost knocked into the point of the sword on his back, making him break into a cold sweat. Turning north, not far from the palace, he found the people packed closely together, craning their necks toward the road. The cries of women and children could be heard from the crowd. Afraid his invisible sword might hurt someone, he dared not push his way forward; but people were pressing up from behind. He had to move out of their way, till all he could see was the backs of people in front of him, craning their necks.

All of a sudden, the people in front knelt down one after the other; in the distance he could see two riders galloping forward side by side. They were followed by warriors carrying batons, spears, swords, bows and flags, who raised a cloud of dust. After them came a large cart drawn by four horses, in which sat a band sounding gongs and drums, and blowing some strange musical instruments. Behind were carriages with courtiers in bright clothes, old men or short, puffy fellows, their faces glistening with perspiration. These were followed by a troop of riders bearing swords, spears and halberds. Then the kneeling people prostrated themselves. Mei Chien Chih saw a great carriage with a yellow canopy drive up, in the middle of which was seated a fat man in bright clothes. He had a grizzled beard and small head, and seemed to be wearing at his side a sword like the one on his own back.

The lad gave an instinctive shudder, but immediately was afire again, as if flames were burning him. Stretching his hand to grip the sword on his

back, he picked his way forward between the necks of the kneeling crowd.

But he had only taken five or six steps when someone tripped him up and made him fall headlong on top of a young fellow with a wizened face. He was afraid the point of his sword might have hurt him, and was getting up nervously to see, when he received two hard punches in the ribs. Without stopping to protest he looked again at the road, but not only had the carriage with the yellow canopy passed, even the mounted attendants behind it were already some distance away.

The people on both sides of the road got up again. The youngster with the wizened face had kept hold of Mei Chien Chih's collar, and wouldn't let him go. He accused him of crushing his solar plexus,* and ordered him to guarantee that if he died before he was eighty, the boy would pay for it. Idlers crowded round to gape, but none of them said anything; then a few bystanders let fall some jokes and curses, taking the side of the wizened young man. In the face of such enemies, Mei Chien Chih didn't know whether to laugh or lose his temper. It was annoying, yet he couldn't get away.

This went on for about the length of time it takes to cook a pan of millet. By then Mei Chien Chih was afire with impatience, yet still the onlookers did not disperse, but went on watching as avidly as ever.

Then a dark man pushed his way through the knot of people. He had a black beard and black eyes, and was as lean as a rake. Without a word, he smiled coldly at Mei Chien Chih, raised his hand to flick the jaw of the youngster with the wizened face, and looked

* Taoists believed that the solar plexus was the most vital part of the body.

steadily into his eyes. The youngster returned his stare for a time, then slowly let go of the boy's collar, and made off. The dark man made off too, and the crowd drifted disappointed away. Only a few people came up to ask Mei Chien Chih his age and address, and whether he had sisters at home. But Mei Chien Chih ignored them.

He walked south, thinking since there was so much bustle and activity in the city it would be easy to wound someone by accident, and he would do better to wait outside the south gate for the king to come back, and then avenge his father. There was plenty of space there, and not too many people; it was really the best place for what he had to do. By now all the citizens were discussing the king's trip to the mountain, his retinue, his majesty, what an honour it was for them to see the king, how low some had prostrated themselves, and how they should be considered as exemplary citizens. They were buzzing about like bees. Only near the south gate did things become quieter.

He walked out of the city and sat under a big mulberry tree, where he ate two rolls of steamed bread. As he was eating he thought of his mother, and felt a lump in his throat, but presently that passed. All around grew quieter and quieter, until he could hear his own breathing quite distinctly.

As dusk fell, he grew more and more uneasy, and strained his eyes ahead, but not a sign could he see of the king. The villagers who had taken vegetables to the city to sell were one by one going home with empty baskets.

Long after all these peasants had passed, the dark man came quickly out from the city.

"Run, Mei Chien Chih! The king is after you," he said. His voice was like the cry of an owl.

Mei Chien Chih trembled from head to foot. Then, as if under a spell, he followed the dark man, and presently they were running at full speed. He stopped to pant for a while before he realized they had reached the edge of the pine wood. Far behind were silver rays, where the moon was rising; but in front all that could be seen were the dark man's eyes blazing like will-o'-the-wisps.

"How did you know me? . . ." the lad asked in fear and amazement.

"I've always known you." The man laughed. "I know you carry a sword on your back to avenge your father. And I know you will fail. Not only will you fail to avenge him, but today someone has informed against you. Your enemy went back to the palace long ago by the east gate, and has issued an order for your arrest."

Mei Chien Chih began to feel wretched.

"Oh, no wonder mother sighed," he muttered.

"But she only knows half. She doesn't know that I'm going to take vengeance for you."

"You? Are you willing to take vengeance for me, sir knight?"

"Ah, don't insult me by calling me that."

"Well then, is it because you sympathize with widows and orphans?"

"Don't use names that have been sullied, child," he said sternly. "Knighthood, sympathy and all the rest used to be clean, but now they've become capital for usurers. I set no store by these things. I want only to avenge you!"

"Good. But how will you do it?"

"I want only two things from you." His voice sounded from beneath two burning eyes. "What two things? I'll tell you: one is your sword, the other is your head!"

Although Mei Chien Chih thought the request strange and hesitated, he was not afraid. But for a moment he remained speechless.

"Don't be afraid that I want to trick you out of your life and your treasure." The voice sounded sternly again in the dark. "It's entirely up to you. If you trust me, I'll go to kill the king; if you don't, I won't."

"But why are you going to take vengeance for me? Did you know my father?"

"I knew your father all along, just as I've always known you. But that's not why I want to take vengeance. You don't understand, my boy, how good I am at revenge. What's yours is mine, and what concerns others concerns me too. I bear on my soul so many wounds inflicted both by others and by myself, that I already hate myself!"

As soon as the voice in the dark stopped, Mei Chien Chih raised his hand to grasp the blue sword on his back and with the same movement swung it forward from the nape of his neck, so that his head fell on the green moss at his feet even as he handed the sword to the dark man.

"Ah!" He took the sword with one hand, and with the other picked up Mei Chien Chih's head by its hair. He kissed the warm, dead lips twice, and gave a cold, shrill laugh.

His laughter spread straightway through the pine wood, and immediately, deep in the forest, flashed blazing eyes, which, in a second, came so close that you could hear the snuffling of hungry wolves. With one bite Mei Chien Chih's clothes were torn completely off him; with another, his whole body disappeared, and the blood was instantaneously licked clean, while all that could be heard was the soft crunching of bones.

The huge wolf at the head of the pack hurled itself at the dark man. But with one sweep of the blue sword, its head fell on the green moss at his feet. The other wolves tore off its skin apparently with one bite, while with another its whole body disappeared. The blood was instantaneously licked clean, and all that could be heard was the soft crunching of bones.

The dark man picked up the blue coat from the ground to wrap up Mei Chien Chih's head, and fastened this and the blue sword on to his back. Then he turned on his heel, and swung off through the darkness toward the capital.

The wolves stood stock-still, hunched up with lolling tongues, panting, watching him with green eyes as he strode away.

He swung through the darkness toward the capital, singing in a shrill voice as he went:

Sing hey, sing ho!

The single one who loved the sword

Has taken death as his reward.

Those who go single are galore,

Who love the sword are alone no more!

Foe for foe, ha! Head for head!

Two men by their own hands are dead.

III

The king could take no pleasure in his trip to the mountain; and the secret report that there was an assassin lying in wait for him made him go back feeling even more depressed. He was in a very bad temper that night, and complained that even the ninth concubine's hair was not as black and glossy as the day before. Fortunately, she perched herself affectionately on his royal knee, and wriggled specially

over seventy times, until the wrinkles on his kingly brow were gradually smoothed out.

When the king got up after noon the next day he was in a rather bad mood again, and by the time he had had lunch, he was furious.

"I'm bored!" he bellowed, with a great yawn.

This threw everyone from the queen down to the court jester into a panic. The king had long been sick and tired of his old ministers' sermons and the clowning of his plump dwarfs; recently he had even been finding marvellous tricks like tightrope walking, pole climbing, juggling, somersaulting, sword swallowing and fire spitting quite insipid. He was given to bursts of rage, in which he would draw his sword and look for some trifling fault so that he could kill a few people.

Two eunuchs who had slipped out of the palace to play truant had just come back. When they saw the general air of gloom in the court, they knew that great trouble was brewing again, and one of them turned pale with fear. The other, however, looked very confident. He made his way unhurriedly to the king's presence, where he prostrated himself, and said:

"Your slave has just met a remarkable man with rare skill, who will be able to amuse Your Majesty. I have come to inform Your Majesty of this."

"What?!" The king never wasted words.

"He's a lean, dark fellow, who looks like a beggar. He's dressed in blue, has a round blue bundle on his back, and he keeps singing snatches of strange doggerel. Asked what he does, he says he can do a wonderful trick, the equal of which has never been seen—it has no match in the world. No one has ever seen the like before. The sight will put an end to care and bring peace to the world. But when people ask him to perform, he refuses. He says he must

have first a golden dragon, second a golden cauldron. . . ."

"A golden dragon?* That's me. A golden cauldron? I have one."

"That's just what your slave thought. . . ."

"Bring him in!"

Before the king's voice had died away, four guards hurried out with the eunuch. Everyone from the queen down to the court jester beamed with delight. They all hoped this conjuror could put an end to care and bring peace to the world. And even if the show fell flat, there would be the lean, dark beggarly looking fellow to bear the brunt of the royal displeasure. If they could last till he was brought in, all would be well.

Presently six men could be seen hurrying toward the throne. The eunuch led the way, the four guards brought up the rear, and in the middle was a dark man. As they drew near, it was seen that this man was wearing a blue coat, his beard, eyebrows and hair were black, and he was so thin that his cheekbones stood out and his eyes were sunken. As he knelt respectfully to prostrate himself, a small round bundle could be seen on his back, wrapped in blue cloth with a dark red pattern.

"Well!" shouted the king impatiently. This fellow's paraphernalia looked so simple, the king doubted whether he could do any good tricks.

"Your subject's name is Yen-chih-ao-che, born in Wenwen Village. I wasn't bred to any trade, but when I was grown I met a sage, who taught me to conjure with a boy's head. I can't do this alone, though. It must be in the presence of a golden dragon, and I must have a golden cauldron, filled with

* In feudal China, the dragon symbolized the sovereign.

clear water, heated with charcoal. Then when the boy's head is put in, and the water boils, the head will rise and fall, and dance all manner of figures. It will make wonderful sounds too, and laugh and sing. Whoever hears its song and sees it dance will know an end to care, while if all the people see it, the whole world will have peace."

"Go ahead!" the king ordered loudly.

Before long a great golden cauldron, big enough to boil an ox, was set before the throne and filled with water, and charcoal was lit under it. The dark man stood at one side, and when he saw the charcoal was red he put down his bundle and undid it, then picked up the boy's head in both hands, and held it high. It had fine eyebrows and brilliant eyes, white teeth and red lips, and a smile played round its mouth. Its tangled hair was like faint smoke. The dark man raised it high and turned round for all to see, then held it over the cauldron while he muttered something, and finally dropped it so that it fell with a splash into the water. Foam flew up at least five feet high, and after that all was still again.

For a long time nothing happened. The king grew impatient, and the queen and concubines, ministers and eunuchs began to feel alarmed, while the plump dwarfs were beginning to sneer. When the king saw their sneers, he felt he was being made a fool of, and turned to the guards, meaning to order them to have this oaf who dared deceive his monarch thrown into the great cauldron and boiled to death.

However, that very instant he heard the water bubbling; the charcoal was crackling away too and casting a ruddy glow over the dark man, so that he looked like iron that had turned a faint red. As soon as the king turned back again, the dark man lifted

both hands towards the sky, stared into space, danced, and suddenly started singing in a shrill voice:

Sing hey for love, for love heigh ho!
Ah, love! Ah, blood! Who is not so?
Men grope in dark, the king laughs loud,
Ten thousand heads in death have bowed.
I only use one single head,
For one man's head let blood be shed!
Blood—let it flow!
Sing hey, sing ho!

As he sang, the water in the cauldron seethed up conewise like a small mountain; but from its tip to the bottom of the cauldron it remained flowing and eddying all the time. The head bobbed up and down with the water, skimming round and round, nimbly turning somersaults as it went, and people could make out a smile of pleasure on its face. After some time it gave this up to start swimming against the stream, circling, weaving to and fro, and splashing water in all directions so that hot drops showered the court. One of the dwarfs gave a sudden cry, and rubbed his nose. He had been scalded, and couldn't help crying out with the pain.

As soon as the dark man stopped singing, the head stopped in the middle of the water, facing the throne, assuming a grave expression. After staying like this for a few seconds, it began bobbing up and down slowly again. From bobbing it speeded up to swim up and down, not very quickly but extremely gracefully. It swam three times around the edge of the water, ducking up and down, then opened its eyes wide, the jet-black pupils looking unusually brilliant, as it opened its mouth to sing:

The sovereign's rule spreads far and wide,
He conquers foes on every side.
The world may end, but not his might,

So here I come all gleaming bright.
Bright gleams the sword—forget me not!
A royal sight, but sad my lot.
Sing hey, sing ho, a royal sight!
Come back, where gleams the bright blue light.

The head suddenly stopped at the crest of the water. Then, after turning several somersaults, it started plying up and down again, looking to right and to left very bewitchingly, as it sang once more:

Heigh ho, for the love we know!
I cut one head, one head, heigh ho!
I use one single head, not more,
The heads he uses are galore! . . .

By the fifth line of the song, the head was submerged, and since it did not come up again, the singing could not be heard distinctly. As the singing grew fainter, the seething water gradually sank back like an ebbing tide, until it was below the rim of the cauldron, so that from a distance nothing could be seen.

"Well?" demanded the king impatiently, after waiting for a little.

"Your Majesty," the dark man went down on one knee, "it's dancing the most miraculous circular dance at the bottom of the cauldron. This can't be seen except from close by. I've no power to make it come up, because this circular dance has to be done at the bottom of the cauldron."

The king stood up and strode down the steps to stand by the cauldron, regardless of the heat, bending forward to watch. The water was smooth as a mirror, and the head was lying there looking up, its two eyes fixed on the king. When the king's eyes lighted on its face, it gave a charming smile. This smile made the king feel they had met before, but he could not for the moment recall who this was. As he

was wondering, the dark man drew the blue sword from his back, swept it forward like lightning from the nape of the king's neck, and the king's head fell with a splash into the cauldron.

When enemies meet, they know each other at a glance, particularly at close quarters. As soon as the king's head touched the water, Mei Chien Chih's head came up to meet it, and took a bite out of its ear. At once the water in the cauldron boiled, bubbling furiously; and the two heads started a fight to the death in the water. After about twenty encounters, the king's head was wounded in five places, and Mei Chien Chih's in seven. The crafty king contrived to slip up behind his enemy, and in an unguarded moment Mei Chien Chih let himself be caught at the back of his neck, so that he couldn't turn round. The king's head fastened its teeth into him and wouldn't let go, sinking its teeth deeper and deeper; and the boy's cries of pain could be heard even outside the cauldron. Everybody from the queen down to the court jester, who had been petrified with fright before, was galvanized into life by this sound, and felt as sad as if the sun had been swallowed up in darkness. They were all over gooseflesh; but this was followed by a secret joy, as they stared round-eyed, as if in expectation of something.

The dark man seemed rather taken aback too, but he did not change colour. Effortlessly he raised his arm like a withered branch holding the invisible sword, and stretched forward as if to peer into the cauldron. His arm suddenly bent, the sword thrust down swiftly from behind, and his severed head fell into the cauldron with a plop, sending snow white foam flying in all directions.

As soon as his head hit the water, it charged straight at the king's head, and took the royal nose between

its teeth, practically biting it off. The king let out a cry of pain, and as he opened his mouth Mei Chien Chih's head managed to get away, whirling round to get a vice-like grip on his jaw. They not only held on tight, but pulled with all their might in opposite directions, tugging so that the king's head couldn't keep its mouth shut any more. Then they began biting at him furiously like famished hens pecking at rice, till the king's head was completely mauled, and bitten out of recognition. To begin with he could still roll frantically about in the cauldron, later he just lay there groaning, and finally he fell silent, at his last gasp.

The heads of the dark man and Mei Chien Chih gradually stopped biting, left the king's head and swam once round the edge of the cauldron, to see whether he was shamming or whether he was really dead. When they found that the king's head had really breathed its last, they exchanged glances and smiled, then closed their eyes, looked heavenwards, and sank to the bottom of the water.

IV

The fire went out, and the water stopped boiling. The extraordinary silence brought everybody in the court to their senses. Someone made an exclamation, and at once they were all calling out in fright together. Then someone else walked over to the golden cauldron, and all the others pressed after him. Those crowded at the back could only peer between the necks of those in front.

The heat still scorched their faces. But the water in the cauldron was as smooth as a mirror, with a coating of oil on top, which reflected all their faces:

the queen, concubines, guards, old ministers, dwarfs, eunuchs. . . .

"Heavens! Our great king's head is still in there! Terrible! Terrible!" And the sixth concubine burst into wild sobs.

Consternation seized them all, from the queen down to the court jester. They scattered in panic, all at a complete loss, running round and round in circles. The wisest old councillor went forward alone, stretched out his hand to touch the side of the cauldron, then trembled all over, drew back his hand at once, and put two fingers to his mouth to blow on them again and again.

Finally gaining control over themselves, they gathered outside the door to discuss how to fish the head out. They consulted for the length of time it would take to cook three pans of millet, and finally reached a conclusion: that was, to collect wire scoops from the big kitchen, and order the guards to do their best to retrieve the royal head.

Soon the implements were ready: wire scoops, strainers, golden dishes and dusters were all placed by the cauldron. Then the guards rolled up their sleeves, some of them using the wire scoops, some the strainers, and set respectfully about bringing up the remains. The scoops could be heard striking against each other and scraping the edge of the cauldron, while the water eddied about in their wake. After some time, one of the guards' faces grew suddenly grave, as he very carefully raised his scoop slowly in both hands. Drops of water like pearls dripped from the scoop, in which could be seen a snow white skull. All cried out with astonishment, and he deposited the skull on one golden dish.

"Oh dear! Our king!" The queen, concubines, ministers and even the eunuchs burst out sobbing.

Presently, however, they stopped, because the guard had fished out another skull just like the first.

They looked dully round with tear-filled eyes, and saw the perspiring guards were still fishing. They fished out a tangled mass of white hair and black hair, and several spoonfuls of some very short hairs which looked like white beards and black beards. Then another skull. Then three hairpins.

They stopped only when nothing but clear soup was left in the cauldron. Then they divided what they had salvaged on to three golden dishes; one dish of skulls, one dish of hair, one dish of hairpins.

"Our king only had one head. Which is the king's head?" demanded the ninth concubine frantically.

"Quite so. . . ." The ministers looked at each other in dismay.

"If the skin and flesh hadn't boiled away, it would be easy to tell," said one kneeling dwarf.

They forced themselves to examine the skulls dispassionately, but the size and colour were about the same, so that they couldn't even tell which was the boy's head. The queen said the king had a scar on his right temple as the result of a fall he had had when he was prince, and it might have left a trace on the skull. Sure enough, the dwarfs discovered such a mark on one of the skulls, and there was general rejoicing, until another dwarf discovered a similar mark on the right temple of a slightly yellower skull.

"I know!" exclaimed the third concubine happily. "Our king had a very high nose."

The eunuchs hastened to examine the noses, and found one of them was certainly relatively high, although there really wasn't much to choose between them; but the worst of it was that particular skull had no mark on the right temple.

"Besides," said the ministers to the eunuchs, "could the back of our king's skull have been so pointed?"

"We never paid any attention to the back of His Majesty's head. . . ."

The queen and the concubines started thinking back too; some said it was pointed, and some flat. When they called the eunuch who had combed the royal hair, and questioned him, he wouldn't say anything.

That evening they held a meeting of princes and ministers to decide which head was the king's, but with no better result than during the day. In fact, even the hair and beards presented a problem. The white was of course the king's; but since his hair was grizzled, it was very difficult to decide about the black. They discussed for half the night, and had just set aside a few red hairs when the ninth concubine protested, because she was sure she had seen a few yellow hairs in the king's beard; in which case how could they be sure there was not a single red one? So they had to put them all together again, and leave the case unsettled.

They had still got nowhere by the early hours of the morning. They prolonged the discussion amid yawns till the cock crowed, before they fixed on a really safe and satisfactory solution. That was that all three heads should be placed in the golden coffin beside the king's body for burial.

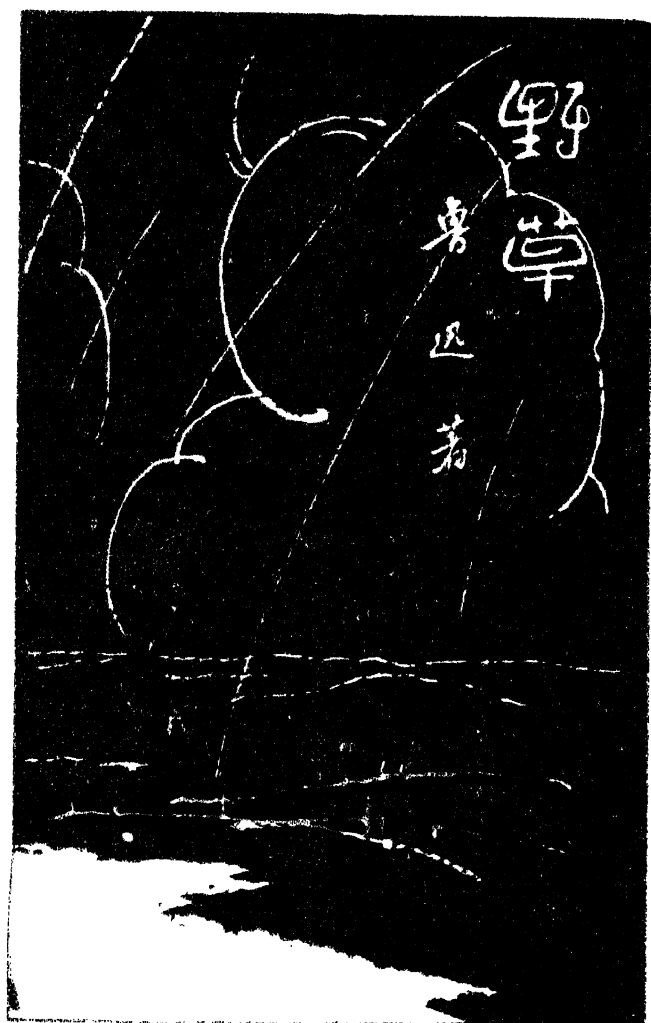
The funeral took place a week later, and the whole city was agog. Citizens of the capital and people from far away flocked to watch the royal funeral. As soon as it was light, the road was packed with men and women; and sandwiched in between were tables with sacrificial offerings. In the middle of the morning horsemen cantered out to clear the roads. Some time later came a procession of flags, batons, spears, bows, halberds and the like, followed by four cart-

loads of musicians. Then, rising and falling with the uneven ground, came a yellow canopy which drew gradually nearer, till it was possible to make out the hearse with the golden coffin, in which lay three heads and one body.

As the people knelt down, rows of tables of offerings stood out among the crowd. Some loyal subjects were very indignant, and swallowed tears to think that the spirits of those two regicides must be enjoying the sacrifice now together with the king; but there was nothing they could do about it.

Then followed the carriages of the queen and concubines. The people looked at them, and they looked at the people, without stopping their wailing. After them came the ministers, eunuchs and dwarfs. All these had assumed a mournful air, but the people paid no attention to them, and their procession was already squeezed out of any semblance of order.

October 1926



The original cover of *Wild Grass* designed by Sun Fu-hsi, with the title in Lu Hsiang-shan's handwriting

AUTUMN NIGHT

Over the wall from my back garden you can see two trees. One is a date tree; so is the other.

The night sky above them is strange and high. I have never seen such a strange, high sky. It seems to want to leave this world of men, so that when folk look up they won't be able to see it. For the moment, though, it is singularly blue; and its scores of starry eyes are blinking coldly. A faint smile plays round its lips, a smile which it seems to think highly significant; and it dusts the wild flowers in my garden with heavy frost.

I don't know what these plants are called, what names they are commonly known by. I know one of them had minute pink flowers. That is the one whose flowers linger still, although more minute than ever. Shivering in the cold night air they dream of the coming of spring, of the coming of autumn, of the lean poet wiping his tears upon their last petals, who tells them autumn will come and winter will come, yet spring will follow when butterflies flit to and fro, and all the bees start humming songs of spring. Then the little pink flowers smile, though they have turned a mournful crimson with cold and are shivering still.

As for the date trees, they have lost absolutely all their leaves. Before, one or two boys still came to beat down the dates other people had missed. But now not one date is left, and the trees have lost all their leaves as well. They know the little pink

flowers' dream of spring after autumn; and they know the dream of the fallen leaves of autumn after spring. They may have lost all their leaves and have only their branches left; but these, no longer weighed down with fruit and foliage, are stretching themselves luxuriously. A few boughs, though, are still drooping, nursing the wounds made in their bark by the sticks which beat down the dates; while, rigid as iron, the straightest and longest boughs silently pierce the strange, high sky, making it blink in dismay. They pierce even the full moon in the sky, making it pale and ill at ease.

Blinking in dismay, the sky becomes bluer and bluer, more and more uneasy, as if eager to escape from the world of men and avoid the date trees, leaving the moon behind. But the moon, too, is hiding herself in the east; while, silent still and as rigid as iron, the bare boughs pierce the strange, high sky, resolved to inflict on it a mortal wound, no matter how bewitchingly it flutters its eyelids.

With a shriek, a fierce night-bird passes.

All of a sudden, I hear midnight laughter. The sound is muffled, as if not to wake those who sleep; yet all around the air resounds to this laughter. Midnight, and no one else is by. At once I realize it is I who am laughing, and at once I am driven by this laughter back to my room. At once I turn up the wick of my kerosene lamp.

A pit-a-pat sounds from the glass of the back window, where insects are dashing themselves against the pane. Presently some get in, no doubt through a hole in the paper. Once in, they set up another pit-a-pat by dashing themselves against the chimney of the lamp. One hurls itself into the chimney from above, to fall into the flame, and I fancy the flame is real. On the paper shade two or three others rest, panting.

The shade is a new one since last night. Its snow-white paper is pleated in wave-like folds, and painted in one corner is a spray of blood-red gardenias.

When the blood-red gardenias blossom, the date trees, weighed down with bright foliage, will dream once more the dream of the little pink flowers. . . . I hear the midnight laughter again, and hastily break off this train of thought to look at the small green insects still on the paper. Like sunflower seeds with their large heads and small tails, they are only half the size of a grain of wheat, the whole of them an adorable, heartrending green.

I yawn, light a cigarette, and puff out the smoke, paying silent homage before the lamp to these green and exquisite heroes.

September 15, 1924

THE SHADOW'S LEAVETAKING

If you sleep to a time when you lose track of time, your shadow may come to take his leave with these words:

"There is something I dislike in heaven; I do not want to go there. There is something I dislike in hell; I do not want to go there. There is something I dislike in your future golden world; I do not want to go there.

"It is you, though, that I dislike.

"Friend, I do not intend to go with you, nor do I want to stay here.

"I do not want to!

"Ah, no! I do not want to. I would rather wander in nothingness.

"I am only a shadow. I shall leave you and sink into darkness. Though darkness may swallow me up, yet light also may cause me to vanish.

"But I do not want to wander between light and shade; I would rather sink into darkness.

"Yet I am for ever wandering between light and shade, uncertain whether it is dusk or dawn. I can only raise my ashen-grey hand as if to drain a cup of wine. At the time when time is no more, I shall go far away alone.

"Alas! If it is dusk, black night will surely engulf me, or I shall be made to vanish in the daylight if it is dawn.

"Friend, the time is at hand.

"I am going to enter darkness to wander in nothingness.

"You are still wondering what gift I shall give you. What is there for me to give? If you insist, you shall have the same darkness and nothingness. But I would like it to be only darkness, or the daylight which will make me vanish into you. I would like it to be only nothingness; on no account would I take possession of your heart.

"This is what I would like, friend—

"To go far away alone to a darkness from which not only will you be excluded, but other shadows too. There will be myself alone sunk in the darkness. That world will be wholly mine."

September 24, 1924

THE BEGGARS

I am skirting a high, crumbling wall, trudging through the fine dust. Several other people are walking alone. A breeze springs up, and above the wall the branches of tall trees, their leaves still unwithered, are stirring over my head.

A breeze springs up, and dust is everywhere.

A child begs from me. He is wearing lined clothes and does not look unhappy, yet he blocks my way to kowtow and whines as he follows me.

I dislike his voice, his manner. I detest his lack of sadness, as if this were some game. I object to the way in which he follows me, whining.

I walk on. Several other people are walking alone. A breeze springs up, and dust is everywhere.

A child begs from me. He is wearing lined clothes and does not look unhappy, but he is dumb. He stretches out his hands to me in dumb show.

I detest this dumb show of his. Besides, he may not be dumb; this may just be his way of begging.

I do not give him alms. I have no wish to give alms. I remain above those alms-givers. For him I have only disgust, suspicion and hate.

I am skirting a tumbledown, mud wall. Broken bricks have been piled in the gap, and beyond the wall is nothing. A breeze springs up, sending the autumn chill through my lined gown, and dust is everywhere.

I wonder what method I should use in begging. In what voice should I speak? What dumb show should I use if pretending to be dumb? . . .

Several other people are walking alone.

I shall receive no alms, not even the wish to give alms. I shall receive the disgust, suspicion and hate of those who are above the alms-givers.

I shall beg with inactivity and silence. . . .

I shall at last receive nothingness.

A breeze springs up, and dust is everywhere. Several other people are walking alone.

Dust, dust. . . .

Dust. . . .

September 24, 1924

REVENGE

Because he thinks himself the Son of God, the King of the Jews, he is to be crucified.

The soldiers put on him a purple robe, make him wear a crown of thorns, and wish him joy. Then they beat his head with a reed, spit upon him, and bow the knee before him. After they have mocked him, they strip off his purple robe and leave him wearing his own clothes as before.

See how they beat his head, spit upon him, kneel before him. . . .

He will not drink the wine mixed with myrrh, for he wants to remain sober to savour the Israelites' treatment of their Son of God, and have longer to pity their future but hate their present.

All around is hate, pitiable, execrable.

Hammering is heard, and nails pierce his palms. But the fact that these pitiable creatures are crucifying their Son of God makes him feel less pain. Hammering is heard, and nails pierce the soles of his feet, breaking a bone so that pain shoots through his marrow. But the fact that these execrable creatures are crucifying their Son of God comforts him in his pain.

The cross is hoisted up. He is hanging in mid-air.

He has not drunk the wine mixed with myrrh. He wants to remain sober to savour the Israelites' treatment of their Son of God, and have longer to pity their future but hate their present.

All the passers-by insult and curse him, the chief priests and the scribes also mock him, the two thieves being crucified with him laugh at him too.

Even those being crucified with him. . . .

All around is hate, pitiable, execrable.

In the pain from his hands and feet he savours the sorrow of the pitiable creatures who are crucifying the Son of God, and the joy of the execrable creatures who are crucifying the Son of God and who know that the Son of God is about to die. Sudden agony from his broken bones shoots to his heart and marrow, intoxicating him with great ecstasy and compassion.

His belly heaves in the agony of compassion and execration.

There is darkness over all the earth.

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" That means: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

God has forsaken him, and so he is the son of man after all. But the Israelites are crucifying even the son of man.

Those who reek most of blood and filth are not those who crucify the Son of God, but those who crucify the son of man.

December 20, 1924

HOPE

My heart is extraordinarily lonely.

But my heart is very tranquil, void of love and hate, joy and sadness, colour and sound.

I am probably growing old. Is it not a fact that my hair is turning white? Is it not a fact that my hands are trembling? Then the hands of my spirit must also be trembling. The hair of my spirit must also be turning white.

But this has been the case for many years.

Before that my heart once overflowed with sanguinary songs, blood and iron, fire and poison, resurgence and revenge. Then suddenly my heart became empty, except when I sometimes deliberately filled it with vain, self-deluding hope. Hope, hope—I took this shield of hope to withstand the invasion of the dark night in the emptiness, although behind this shield there was still dark night and emptiness. But even so I slowly wasted my youth.

I knew, of course, that my youth had perished. But I thought that the youth outside me still existed: stars and moonlight, dead fallen butterflies, flowers in the darkness, the funereal omens of the owl, the weeping with blood of the nightingale, the indecision of laughter, the dance of love. . . . Although it might be a youth of sadness and uncertainty, it was still youth.

But why is it now so lonely? Is it because even the youth outside me has perished, and the young people of the world have all grown old?

I have to grapple alone with the dark night in the emptiness. I put down the shield of hope, hearing the *Song of Hope* by Petöfi Sandor:

“What is Hope? A prostitute!

Alluring to all, she gives herself to all,

Until you have sacrificed a priceless treasure —

Your youth—then she forsakes you.”

It is already seventy-five years since this great lyric poet and Hungarian patriot died for his fatherland on the spears of the Cossacks. Sad though his death, it is even sadder that his poetry has not yet died.

But—so wretched is life—even a man as daring and resolute as Petöfi had in the end to halt before the dark night and gaze back towards the distant Orient.

“Despair, like hope,” he said, “is but vanity.”

If I must still live in this vanity which is neither light nor darkness, then I would seek the youth of sadness and uncertainty which has perished, even though it is outside me. For once the youth outside me vanishes, my own old age will also wither away.

But now there are neither stars nor moonlight, no dead fallen butterflies, no indecision of laughter, no dance of love. The young people are very peaceful.

So I have to grapple alone with the dark night in the emptiness. Even if I cannot find the youth outside me, I would at least discard my own old age. But where is the dark night? Now there are neither stars nor moonlight, no indecision of laughter, no dance of love. The young people of the world are very peaceful, and before me there is not even a real dark night.

Despair, like hope, is but vanity.

New Year's Day, 1925

SNOW

The rain of warm countries has never congealed into icy, glittering snowflakes. Men who have seen the world consider this humdrum; does the rain, too, think it unfortunate? The snow south of the Yangtse is extremely moist and pretty, like the first indefinable intimation of spring, or the bloom of a young girl radiant with health. In that snowy solitude are blood-red camellias, pale, white plum blossom tinged with green, and the golden, bell-shaped flowers of the winter plum; while beneath the snow lurk cold green weeds. Butterflies there are certainly none, and whether or no bees come to gather honey from the camellias and plum blossom I cannot clearly remember. But before my eyes I can see the wintry flowers in their snowy solitude, with bees flying busily to and fro—I can hear their humming and droning.

Seven or eight children, who have gathered to build a snow Buddha, are breathing on their little red fingers, frozen like crimson shoots of ginger. When they are not successful, somebody's father comes to help. The Buddha is higher than the children; and though it is only a pear-shaped mass which might be a gourd or might be a Buddha, it is beautifully white and dazzling. Held together by its own moisture, the whole thing glitters and sparkles. The children use fruit stones for its eyes, and steal rouge from some mother's vanity-case for its lips. So now it is really

a respectable Buddha. With gleaming eyes and scarlet lips, it sits on the snowy ground.

Some children come to visit it the next day. Clapping their hands before it, they nod their heads and laugh. The Buddha just sits there alone. A fine day melts its skin, but a cold night gives it another coat of ice, till it looks like opaque crystal. Then a series of fine days makes it unrecognizable, and the rouge on its lips disappears.

But the snowflakes that fall in the north remain to the last like powder or sand and never intermingle, whether scattered on roofs, the ground or the withered grass. The warmth from the stoves inside has melted some of the snow on the roofs. As for the rest, when a whirlwind springs up under a clear sky, it flies up wildly, glittering in the sunlight like thick mist around a flame, revolving and rising till it fills the sky, and the whole sky glitters as it whirls and rises.

On this boundless plain, under heaven's chilly vault, this glittering, spiralling wraith is the ghost of rain. . . .

Yes, it is lonely snow, dead rain, the ghost of rain.

January 18, 1925

THE KITE

A Peking winter dismays and depresses me: the thick snow on the ground and the bare trees' ashen branches thrusting up towards the clear blue sky, while in the distance one or two kites are floating.

At home, the time for kites is the second month of spring. When you hear the whirr of a wind-wheel, you raise your head to see a grey crab-kite or a soft blue centipede-kite. Or there may be a solitary tile-kite, without a wind-wheel and flown too low, looking pathetically lonely and forlorn. By this time, though, the willows on the ground are putting out shoots, and the early mountain peaches have budded. Set off by the children's fancy-work in the sky, together they make up the warmth of spring. Where am I now? All round me dread winter reigns, while the long-departed spring of my long-forgotten home is floating in this northern sky.

Yet I never liked flying kites. Far from liking kites, in fact, I detested them as playthings of good-for-nothing children. My young brother was just the reverse. He must then have been about ten, often fell ill and was fearfully thin, but his greatest delight was kites. Unable to buy one and forbidden by me to fly one, he would stand for half a day at a time, his small lips parted in longing, gazing raptly at the sky. If a distant crab-kite suddenly came down, he would utter a cry of dismay; if the strings of two tile-kites became

disentangled, he would jump and skip for joy. This struck me as absurd and contemptible.

One day it occurred to me I had not seen much of him lately, but I had noticed him picking up bamboo sticks in the courtyard at the back. The truth dawned on me in a flash. I ran to a small deserted storeroom and, sure enough, as I pushed open the door, I discovered him there in the midst of the dusty debris. He had been sitting on a footstool in front of a big square stool; but now, standing up in confusion, he changed colour and shrank back. Propped up against the big stool was the bamboo framework of a butterfly-kite, not pasted yet with paper; while on the stool lay two small wind-wheels for the butterfly's eyes, which he had just been beautifying with red paper. This work was nearly done. I was pleased to have found out his secret; but furious that he could deceive me so long, while he toiled so single-heartedly to make the toy of a good-for-nothing child. I seized the framework at once and broke one of its wings, then swept the wheels to the ground and trampled on them. In size and strength he was no match for me; so of course I came off completely victorious. Then I stalked out proudly, leaving him in despair in that little room. What he did after that I neither knew nor cared.

But retribution came to me at last, long after we had gone our different ways, when I was already middle-aged. I was unlucky enough to read a foreign book on children, from which I learned for the first time that play is a child's best occupation, and play-things his good angels. At once this childhood tyranny over the spirit, forgotten for more than twenty years, came to my mind; and that instant my heart seemed to turn to lead and sink heavily down and down.

My heart did not break; it simply sank down and down.

I knew how I could make it up to him: give him a kite, approve of his flying it, urge him to fly it, and fly it with him. We could shout, run, laugh! . . . But by this time he, like me, had long had a moustache.

I knew another way I could make it up to him: go to ask his forgiveness, and wait for him to say: "But I didn't blame you at all." Then, surely, my heart would grow lighter. Yes, this way was feasible. There came a day when we met. The hardships of life had left their marks on our faces; and my heart was very heavy. We fell to talking of childhood happenings, and I referred to this episode, admitting that I had been a thoughtless boy. "But I didn't blame you at all," I thought he would say. Then I should have felt forgiven, and my heart would henceforth have been lighter.

"Did that really happen?" He smiled incredulously, as if he were hearing a tale about someone else. It had slipped his mind completely.

The thing was completely forgotten, with no hard feelings. In that case, what forgiveness could there be? Without hard feelings, forgiveness is a lie.

What hope is there for me now? My heart will always be heavy.

Now the spring of my home is in the air of these strange parts again. It carries me back to my long-departed childhood, and brings with it an indefinable sadness. I had better hide in dread winter. But clearly all about me winter reigns, and is even now offering me its utmost rigour and coldness.

January 24, 1925

THE GOOD STORY

The lamp flame slowly dwindled, a sign that there was not much kerosene left; and the kerosene, which was not of the best brand, had already blackened the chimney with its smoke. Crackers exploded on all sides, and cigarette smoke hung round me. It was a dull, dark night.

I closed my eyes and leaned against the back of my chair, resting the hand holding *A Scribbler's Notebook** on my knee.

And in this drowsy state I saw a good story.

It was a lovely, charming, enthralling story. Many beautiful people and beautiful things mingled like the cloud tapestry in the sky, flying past like a myriad shooting stars, yet stretching out into infinity.

I seem to remember rowing a small boat past an ancient highway. On both banks, reflected in the azure stream, were tallow trees and young corn, wild flowers, fowl, dogs, bushes and withered trees, thatched cottages, pagodas, monasteries, farmers and country women, country girls, clothes hanging out to dry, monks, fibre raincoats, hats of bamboo splints, sky, clouds and bamboos. Following each stroke of the oar they caught the flickering sunlight and mingled with the fish and weeds in the water, till all were swaying together. Then shadows and objects shivered and scattered, expanded and merged; but as soon as

* A Tang Dynasty work by Hsu Chien (A.D. 659-729).

they merged they contracted once more, and approached their original form. The outline of each shadow was blurred as a summer cloud fringed with sunlight, darting out quicksilver flames. All the river I passed was like this.

And the story I now saw was like this too. With the blue sky in the water as a background, everything was intermingled, interwoven, ever moving, ever extending, so that I could not see any end to it.

The few sparse hollyhocks beneath the withered willows by the stream must have been planted by the country girls. Great crimson flowers and variegated red flowers, floating in the water, suddenly scattered and stretched out into streamers of crimson water, but with no aura. The thatched cottages, dogs, pagodas, country girls, clouds . . . were floating too. Each of the great crimson flowers stretched out now into rippling red silk belts. The belts interwove with the dogs, the dogs with the clouds, and the white clouds with the country girls. . . . In a twinkling they would contract again. But the reflection of the variegated red flowers was already broken and stretching out to interweave with the pagodas, country girls, dogs, thatched cottages and clouds.

Now the story that I saw became clearer, more lovely, charming, enthralling and distinct. Above the clear sky were countless beautiful people and beautiful things. I saw them all, and I recognized them all.

I was about to look more closely at them. . . .

But as I was about to look more closely at them, I opened my eyes with a start to see the cloud tapestry wrinkle and tangle as if someone had thrown a big stone into the water, so that waves leapt up and tore the whole image to shreds. I snatched without thinking at my book, which had nearly slipped to the floor.

Before my eyes still hovered a few rainbow-hued, shattered reflections.

I really loved this good story. While some shattered reflections still remained I wanted to catch them, perfect and perpetuate them. I tossed aside my book, leaned forward and reached for my pen. But now there was not the least reflection left. All I could see was dim lamplight. I was no longer in the little boat.

But I still remember seeing this good story that dull, dark night. . . .

February 24, 1925

THE PASSER-BY

TIME: *some evening.*

PLACE: *somewhere.*

CHARACTERS:

The old man—*aged seventy, he has a white beard and hair and a black gown.*

The girl — *about ten, she has auburn hair and black eyes, and is wearing a gown with black squares on a white background.*

The passer-by—*aged between thirty and forty, he looks tired and crabbed, with a smouldering gaze. He has a black moustache and tousled hair. Dressed in a short black jacket and trousers which are tattered and torn, he has shabby shoes on his stockingless feet. A sack is hanging from his arm, and he leans on a bamboo pole as tall as he is.*

To the east are a few trees and ruins, to the west some forlorn-looking scrub, and a faint track can be made out. A little mud hut has its door open facing this track. Beside the door is a dead tree stump.

[The girl is about to help the old man up from the stump on which he is sitting.]

Old Man: Hey, child! Why have you stopped?

Girl [*looking eastward*]: There is someone coming. Look!

Old Man: Never mind him. Help me inside. The sun is setting.

Girl: Oh, let me have a look.

Old Man: What a child you are! You can see heaven, earth and the wind every day; isn't that enough for you? There is nothing else so worth looking at. Yet you still want to look at some person. Creatures which appear at sunset can't do you any good. . . . We'd better go in.

Girl: But he's already quite close. Ah, it's a beggar.

Old Man: A beggar? That isn't likely.

[*The passer-by limps out from the bushes on the east, and after a moment's hesitation walks slowly up to the old man.*]

Passer-by: Good evening, sir.

Old Man: Thank you. Good evening.

Passer-by: Sir, may I make so bold as to ask for a cup of water? I am parched after walking, and there's not a pool or water-hole to be found.

Old Man: Yes, that's all right. Please sit down. [*To the girl.*] Child, fetch some water. See that the cup is clean.

[*The girl walks silently into the hut.*]

Old Man: Please sit down, stranger. What is your name?

Passer-by: My name? That I don't know. Ever since I can remember, I've been on my own; so I don't know what my name was. As I go on my way, people call me by this name or that as the fancy takes them. But I can't remember them, and I have never been called by the same name twice.

Old Man: I see. Well, where are you from?

Passer-by [*hesitating*]: I don't know. Ever since I can remember, I have been walking like this.

Old Man: All right. Then may I ask you where you are going?

Passer-by: Of course you may. The thing is, I don't know. Ever since I can remember, I have been walking like this, on my way to some place ahead. All I can remember is that I have walked a long way, and now I have arrived here. I shall push on that way [*he points to the west*] ahead!

[*The girl carefully carries out a wooden cup of water and gives it to him.*]

Passer-by [*taking the cup*]: Thank you very much, lass. [*He drinks the water in two gulps, and returns the cup.*] Thank you very much, lass. This was very kind indeed. I really don't know how to thank you.

Old Man: There is no need to be so grateful. It won't do you any good.

Passer-by: No, it won't do me any good. But I feel much better now. I shall push on. You must have been here for quite a long time, sir. Do you know what kind of place that is ahead?

Old Man: Ahead? Ahead are graves.

Passer-by [*startled*]: Graves?

Girl: No, no no! There are ever so many wild roses and lilies there. I often go there to play, to look at them.

Passer-by [*looking west, and appearing to smile*]: Yes, there are many wild roses and lilies there. I have often enjoyed myself there too watching them. But those are graves. [*To the old man.*] Sir, what comes after the graveyard?

Old Man: After the graveyard? That I don't know. I have never been beyond.

Passer-by: You don't know!

Girl: I don't know either.

Old Man: All I know is the south, the north and the east where you come from. Those are the places I am most familiar with, and they may be the best places for such as you. Don't take offence at what I say, but you are already so tired I think you would do better to go back; for if you keep on going you may not come to an end.

Passer-by: I may not come to an end? . . . [*He thinks this over, then starts up.*] No, that won't do! I must go on. If I go back, there's not a place without troubles, not a place without landlords, not a place without expulsion and cages, not a place without smiles on the face, not a place without tears outside the eyes. I hate them. I am not going back.

Old Man: It may not be like that. You may come across some tears that spring from the heart, some sorrow for your sake.

Passer-by: No, I don't want to see the tears that spring from their hearts. I don't want them to sorrow for my sake.

Old Man: In that case, you, [*he shakes his head*] you will just have to go on.

Passer-by: Yes, I'll just have to go on. Besides, there is a voice ahead urging me on and calling me so that I cannot rest. The trouble is my feet are bruised through walking, I have cut them so many times and lost so much blood. [*He raises one foot to show the old man.*] I haven't got enough blood; I need to drink some blood. But where can I get it? Besides, I don't want to drink just anyone's blood. So I have to drink water instead to make up for it. There is always water on the way; I have never found any lack of it. But my strength is failing fast; no doubt because there is too much water in my blood. Today not even one small

water-hole did I find. That must be why I did not walk so far.

Old Man: That may not be why. The sun has set; I think you had better rest for a time, like me.

Passer-by: But the voice ahead is telling me to push on.

Old Man: I know.

Passer-by: You know? You know that voice?

Old Man: Yes. It seems to have called to me before as well.

Passer-by: Is that the same voice that is calling me now?

Old Man: That I can't say. It called me several times, but I ignored it; so then it stopped, and I can't remember it clearly.

Passer-by: Ah, you ignored it. . . . [*He thinks this over, gives a start and listens.*] No! I must still go on. I cannot rest. What a nuisance that my feet are torn and bleeding. [*He prepares to leave.*]

Girl: Here! [*She gives him a length of cloth.*] Bandage your feet.

Passer-by: Thank you very much, lass. [*He takes the cloth.*] This is really. . . . This is really very, very kind of you. With this I can walk much further. [*He sits down on some rubble to bind the cloth round his ankle.*] No, this won't do. [*He tries to stand up.*] I had better give it back to you, lass. It is not enough for a bandage. Besides, this is too kind of you, and I have no way of showing my gratitude.

Old Man: There's no need to be so grateful; it won't do you any good.

Passer-by: No, it won't do me any good. But to me this is the finest gift of all. Look, can you see anything so fine on me?

Old Man: You need not take it so seriously.

Passer-by: I know. But I can't help it. I'm afraid that I behave like this: if I receive a gift, I am like an eagle catching sight of a corpse; I hover around longing for her death, hoping to see it myself. Or I curse all other people but her and pray that they may perish, including myself, for I deserve to be cursed. But I'm not yet strong enough for that. Even if I were, I wouldn't want her to come to such an end, because usually they don't like to come to such ends. So I think this way is best. [*To the girl.*] This cloth is very good, but a little too small. So I'll give it back to you.

Girl [*falling back, frightened*]: I don't want it! Take it with you.

Passer-by [*with something like a smile*]: Ah. . . . Because I have held it?

Girl [*nods and points at his sack*]: Put it in there, and keep it for fun.

Passer-by [*stepping back despondently*]: But how am I to walk with this on my back?

Old Man: Because you won't rest you have no strength to carry it. After a rest you will be all right.

Passer-by: That's right, a rest. . . . [*He reflects, but suddenly gives a start and listens.*] No, I cannot! I must go.

Old Man: Don't you even want to rest?

Passer-by: I do.

Old Man: Well then, rest here for a while.

Passer-by: But I cannot. . . .

Old Man: You still think you had better go on?

Passer-by: Yes, I had better go on.

Old Man: Very well, you must go then.

Passer-by [*stretching himself*]: Good, I'll say good-bye then. I am very grateful to you. [*To the girl.*]

I'll give this back to you, lass. Please take it back.

[Frightened, the girl draws back her hand and hides herself in the hut.]

Old Man: Take it along. If it is too heavy, you can throw it in the graveyard any time.

Girl *[coming forward]*: Oh no, that won't do!

Passer-by: No, that won't do.

Old Man: Well then, you can hang it on the wild roses and lilies.

Girl *[clapping her hands and laughing]*: Good!

Passer-by: Ah. . . .

[For a second there is silence.]

Old Man: Goodbye then. I wish you luck. *[He stands up and turns to the girl.]* Child, help me inside. Look, the sun has already set. *[He turns to the door.]*

Passer-by: Thank you both. I wish you luck. *[He hesitates thoughtfully, then starts.]* But I cannot! I have to go on. I had better go. . . . *[Raising his head, he walks resolutely towards the west.]*

[The girl helps the old man into the hut, then shuts the door. The passer-by limps on towards the wilderness, and night falls behind him.]

March 2, 1925

DEAD FIRE

I dreamed that I was running along the mountain of ice.

It was a huge, towering mountain, reaching to the icy sky above; and the sky was flooded with frozen clouds, each fragment like a fish scale. At the foot of the mountain was the forest of ice, with leaves and branches like the pine and cypress. And all was icy cold, pale as ashes.

But suddenly I fell into the valley of ice.

All around, above and below, was icy cold, pale as ashes. Yet over the pallid ice lay countless red shadows, interlacing like a web of coral. Looking beneath my feet, I saw a flame.

This was dead fire. It had a fiery form, but was absolutely still, completely congealed, like branches of coral with frozen black smoke at their tips which looked scorched as if fresh from a burning house. And so, casting reflections upon the ice all around and being reflected back, it had been turned into countless shadows, making the valley of ice as red as coral.

Aha!

As a child, I always liked to watch the foam ploughed up by swift ships or the fiery flames belched out from a blazing furnace. Not only did I like to watch them, I longed to see them clearly. The pity was they kept changing all the time, and never retained a fixed form. However hard I gazed, I was never left with a clear-cut impression.

Dead flame, now at last I had you!

As I picked up the dead fire to examine it closely, its iciness seared my fingers; but enduring the pain I thrust it into my pocket. The whole valley instantly turned as pale as ashes. At the same time I wondered how to leave this place.

From my body wreathed a coil of black smoke, which reared up like a wire snake. Instantly crimson flames began flowing everywhere, hemming me in like a great conflagration. Looking down, I discovered the dead fire was burning again, had burnt through my clothes and was flowing on the icy ground.

"Ah, friend!" it said. "You awoke me with your warmth!"

I immediately hailed it, and asked its name.

"I was abandoned by men in the valley of ice," it said, ignoring my question. "Those who abandoned me have already perished and vanished. And I was nearly frozen to death by that ice. If you had not warmed me and made me burn again, before long I should have perished."

"I am glad you have awoken. I was just wondering how to leave this valley of ice, and I would like to take you with me so that you may never be frozen but go on burning for ever."

"Ah, no! Then I should burn out."

"I should be sorry if you were to burn out. I had better leave you here."

"Ah, no! I should freeze to death."

"What is to be done then?"

"What will you do yourself?" it countered.

"As I told you, I mean to leave this valley of ice."

"Then I had better burn out!"

It leapt up like a red comet, and together we left the valley. Suddenly a large stone cart drove up, and I

was crushed to death beneath its wheels, but not before I saw the cart fall into the valley of ice.

“Aha! You will never meet the dead fire again.”

I laughed with pleasure as I spoke, as if pleased that this should be so.

April 23, 1925

THE DOG'S RETORT

I dreamed I was walking in a narrow lane, my clothes in rags, like a beggar.

A dog started barking behind me.

I looked back contemptuously and shouted at him:

"Bah! Shut up! You fawn on the rich and bully the poor!"

He sniggered.

"So sorry," he said, "we are not as good as men."

"What!" Quite outraged, I felt that this was the supreme insult.

"I'm ashamed to say I still don't know how to distinguish between copper and silver, between silk and cloth, between officials and common citizens, between masters and their slaves, between. . . ."

I turned and fled.

"Wait a bit! Let us talk some more. . . ." From behind he urged me loudly to stay.

But I ran straight on as fast as I could, until I had run right out of my dream and was back in my own bed.

April 23, 1925

THE GOOD HELL THAT WAS LOST

I dreamed I was lying in bed in the wilderness beside hell. The deep yet orderly wailing of all the ghosts blended with the roar of flames, the seething of oil and the clashing of iron prongs to make one vast, intoxicating harmony, proclaiming to all three worlds the peace of the lower realm.

Before me stood a great man, beautiful and benign, his whole body radiant with light; but I knew he was the devil.

"This is the end of everything! The end of everything! The wretched ghosts have lost their good hell."

He spoke with indignation, then sat down to tell me a story that he knew.

"It was when heaven and earth were made honey-coloured that the devil overcame god, and wielded absolute power. He held heaven, earth, and hell. **Then** he came in person to hell and sat in the midst of it, radiating bright light over all the ghosts.

"Hell had long been neglected: the spiked trees had lost their glitter, the verge of the boiling oil no longer seethed, at times the great fires puffed out merely a little grey smoke, and far off there still bloomed some mandrake flowers, their blossoms very small, pale and wretched. But that was not to be wondered at, for the earth had been fearfully burnt and had naturally lost its fertility.

"Awaking amid the cold oil and lukewarm fires, by the light of the devil the ghosts saw the small flowers

of hell, so pale and wretched, and were completely bewitched. They suddenly remembered the world of men, and after reflecting for none knows how many years, they uttered towards mankind a great cry denouncing hell.

"Man responded and arose, upholding the right he fought against the devil. Louder than thunder, the tumult of fighting filled all three worlds. At last, by dint of great guile and cunning snares, he forced the devil to withdraw from hell. After the final victory, the flag of mankind was hoisted over the gate of hell.

"The ghosts were still rejoicing together when man's emissary to reorganize hell arrived. He sat down in the middle of hell, invested with the majesty of man, and ruled over the ghosts.

"When the ghosts uttered another cry denouncing hell, they became rebels against man. Condemned to eternal damnation for this crime, they were banished to the midst of the spiked trees.

"Man then wielded absolute power over hell, his authority exceeding that of the devil. He reconstructed the ruins, having given the highest post to the Ox-headed One. He also added fuel to the fires, sharpened the sword hills and changed the whole face of hell, doing away with the former decadence.

"At once the mandrake flowers withered. The oil seethed as before, the swords were sharp as before, the fires blazed as before, and the ghosts groaned and writhed as before, until none of them had time to regret the good hell that was lost.

"This was man's success, the devil's misfortune. . . .

"Friend, I see you mistrust me. Yes, you are a man. I must go to look for wild beasts and ghosts. . . ."

June 16, 1925

ON EXPRESSING AN OPINION

I dreamed I was in the classroom of a primary school preparing to write an essay, and asked the teacher how to express an opinion.

"That's hard!" Glancing sideways at me over his glasses, he said: "Let me tell you a story—

"When a son is born to a family, the whole household is delighted. When he is one month old they carry him out to display him to the guests — usually expecting some compliments, of course.

"One says: 'This child will be rich.' Then he is heartily thanked.

"One says: 'This child will be an official.' Then some compliments are made him in return.

"One says: 'This child will die.' Then he is thoroughly beaten by the whole family.

"That the child will die is inevitable, while to say that he will be rich or a high official may be a lie. Yet the lie is rewarded, whereas the statement of the inevitable gains a beating. You. . . ."

"I don't want to tell lies, sir, neither do I want to be beaten. So what should I say?"

"In that case, say: 'Aha! Just look at this child! My word. . . . Oh, my! Oho! Hehe! He, hehehehehe!'"

July 8, 1925

AFTER DEATH

I dreamed I had died by the roadside.

Where I was, how I came to be there, or how I **had** died, all this was a mystery. Anyway, by the time I knew I had died, I was lying there dead.

I heard magpies cry, then crows. The air was very fresh — though it carried a tang of the soil — it must be nearly dawn. I tried to open my eyes, but the lids would not move, as if they simply did not belong to me. Then I tried to raise my hands, and it was the same.

I felt a sudden stab of fear through my heart. When I was alive it used to amuse me to think: If a man's death were simply the paralysis of his motor nerves while sensation still remained, that would be more frightful than total death. Who could tell that my prophecy would come true, or that I was to testify to its truth myself?

I heard footsteps: someone was passing by. A wheel-barrow was pushed past my head; its load was probably heavy, for its squeaking and creaking grated on my nerves and set my teeth on edge. Then everything seemed to turn crimson: the sun must have risen. So I must be facing east. Not that it mattered. A babble of human voices — curious onlookers. They raised a cloud of dust which flew up my nose and made me want to sneeze. I was unable to, though; I just wanted to.

Then came the sound of more and more footsteps, all of which stopped beside me, and there was more whispering: quite a crowd had gathered. I felt a sudden longing to hear what they were saying. But just then I remembered how in my lifetime I used to say that criticism was not worth troubling about. This argument must be false: no sooner was I dead than I saw its error. But though I went on listening, I could not reach any conclusion, for the remarks seemed little more than this:

"Dead, huh? . . ."

"Uhhuh! . . ."

"Well! . . ."

"Dear me. . . . Too bad. . . ."

I was delighted not to hear a single familiar voice. Otherwise, some might grieve for me, some might be glad; some might have more to gossip about after dinner, thus wasting precious time; and all this would make me feel very bad. Now no one had seen me, so no one would be affected. Good. After all I hadn't let anyone down!

But then an ant (I think) started crawling on my back and made me itch. Since I could not stir, I had no means of getting rid of it. Normally, just by turning over I could have made it retreat. Now there was another one on my thigh as well! What do you think you are doing, silly insects!

Things went from bad to worse: there was a buzz and a fly landed on my cheekbone. It took a few steps, then flew to lick the tip of my nose. "I am not a celebrity, sir," I thought ruefully. "You don't have to come here to find material for your gossip column. . . ." But I could not speak out. It came down from the tip of my nose to lick my lips with its clammy tongue, and I wondered if this was a declaration of love. Some others gathered on my eyebrows.

At each step they took, my hair was shaken to its roots. This was going too far — much too far.

With a sudden gust of wind, something covered me from above and they all flew off. As they left I heard them say:

“What a pity! . . .”

I nearly passed out with indignation.

I was brought to myself by the thud of something wooden dropped on the ground and the shaking of the earth. On my forehead I could feel lines made by the straw matting. Then the matting was removed, and at once I felt again the burning heat of the sun.

“Why should he die *here*?” I heard someone ask.

The voice was so near that the speaker must be bending over me. But where should a man die? I used to think although a man could not choose where he would live, he could at least die wherever he pleased. Now I learned this was not the case, and it was very hard to please everyone. What a pity I had long had no pen and paper; but even if I had, I could not write; and even if I wrote, I had nowhere to publish an article. So I had to let it go.

Some men came to carry me off, but I did not know who they were. From the clashing of scabbards I guessed there were police here too, in this place where I should not have died. I was turned round several times, felt myself lifted and set down again, then heard a lid being closed and nails hammered in. But, strangely enough, they used two nails only. Did they always use two nails only in the coffins here?

“I shall be knocking into six walls this time,” I thought. “I’m nailed in as well. This is really the end. It’s all up with me! . . .”

“It’s stuffy in here . . .” I thought.

As a matter of fact, I was much calmer than before, though I could not be sure whether I had been

buried or not. The back of my hand touched the lines on the straw matting, and I felt this type of shroud was not too bad. I was only sorry I did not know who had paid for me. But curse those wretched fellows who had put me in the coffin! One corner of my shirt was creased under my back, but they had not pulled it straight for me, and now it was sticking into me most uncomfortably. Do you think a dead man has no feelings that you act so carelessly? Pah!

My body seemed much heavier than during life, thus its pressure on the creased shirt made me much more uncomfortable than it normally would have. However, I thought I should soon get used to it, or else I should soon rot; thus it should not prove too troublesome. In the meantime I had better meditate quietly.

"How are you, sir? Are you dead?"

The voice was most familiar. When I opened my eyes, I saw it was the messenger from Pokuchai Bookshop. I had not seen him for more than twenty years, but he still looked the same as before. I examined the six sides of my coffin: they were really extremely crude and completely unpolished, the sawn edges still very rough.

"Never mind, that doesn't matter," he said, unwrapping a bundle tied in dark blue cloth. "Here is a Ming Dynasty edition of Kung-yang's *Commentaries** for you. It's Chia Ching period,** and has black margins. Just keep it. And this. . . ."

"You!" I gazed in amazement at his eyes. "Are you mad?" I asked. "Can't you see what condition I'm in? What use do I have for Ming Dynasty editions?"

"That doesn't matter. Never mind."

* *Commentaries on The Spring and Autumn Annals.*

** 1522-1562.

I closed my eyes at once in irritation. For some time there was not a sound, no doubt he was gone. But then it seemed another ant started crawling up my neck and finally reached my face, where it circled round my eyes.

Men never imagined their ideas could change even after death. Suddenly a force shattered the peace of my heart, and many dreams unfolded before my eyes. Some friends had wished me happy, some enemies had wished me blotted out. Yet I had been neither happy nor blotted out, but had lived on somehow obscurely, not fulfilling the expectations of either side. And now I had died like a flitting shadow, without the knowledge even of my foes, unwilling to give them a little pleasure which would cost me nothing. . . .

In my exultation I wanted to cry. These would be my first tears after death.

No tears came, though, after all. There was a sort of flash before my eyes, and I sat up.

July 12, 1925

SUCH A FIGHTER

There will be such a fighter!

No longer ignorant as the African natives shouldering well-polished Mausers, nor listless as the Chinese green-banner troops* carrying light machine-guns. He does not rely on armour made of ox-hide or of scrap-iron. He has nothing but himself, and for weapon nothing but the javelin hurled by barbarians.

He walks into the lines of nothingness, where all that meet him nod to him in the same manner. He knows that this nod is a weapon used by the enemy to kill without bloodshed, by which many fighters have perished. Like a cannon-ball, it renders ineffective the strength of the brave.

Above their heads hang all sorts of flags and banners, embroidered with all manner of titles: philanthropist, scholar, writer, elder, youth, dilettante, gentleman. . . . Beneath are all sorts of surcoats, embroidered with all manner of fine names: scholarship, morality, national culture, public opinion, logic, justice, Asiatic civilization. . . .

But he raises his javelin.

Together they give their solemn oath that their hearts are in the centre of their chests, unlike the case of other prejudiced people. They hope to prove by

* During the Ching Dynasty Han troops, who were poor fighters, were distinguished by green banners.

their breastplates that they themselves believe their hearts are in the centre of their chests.

But he raises his javelin.

He smiles and hurls his javelin to the side, and it pierces them through the heart.

All crumble and fall to the ground, leaving only a surcoat in which there is nothing. The nothingness has escaped and won the victory, because now he has become the criminal who killed the philanthropist and the rest.

But he raises his javelin.

He walks with great strides through the ranks of nothingness, and sees again the same nods, the same banners and surcoats. . . .

But he raises his javelin.

At last he grows old and dies of old age in the lines of nothingness. He is not a fighter after all, and the nothingness is the victor.

In such a place no tumult of fighting is heard, but there is peace.

Peace. . . .

But he raises his javelin!

December 14, 1925

THE WISE MAN, THE FOOL AND THE SLAVE

A slave did nothing but look for people to whom to pour out his woes. This was all he would and all he could do. One day he met a wise man.

"Sir!" he cried sadly, tears pouring down his cheeks. "You know, I lead a dog's life. I may not have a single meal all day, and if I do it is only husks of *kaoliang* which not even a pig would eat. Not to say there is only one small bowl of it. . . ."

"That's really too bad," the wise man commiserated.

"Isn't it?" His spirits rose. "Then I work all day and all night. At dawn I carry water, at dusk I cook the dinner; in the morning I run errands, in the evening I grind wheat; when it's fine I wash the clothes, when it's wet I hold the umbrella; in winter I mind the furnace, in summer I wave the fan. At midnight I boil mushrooms, and wait on our master at his gambling parties; but never a tip do I get, only sometimes the strap. . . ."

"Dear me. . . ." The wise man sighed, and the rims of his eyes looked a little red as if he were going to shed tears.

"I can't go on like this, sir. I must find some way out. But what can I do?"

"I am sure things will improve. . . ."

"Do you think so? I certainly hope so. But now that I've told you my troubles and you've been so

sympathetic and encouraging, I already feel much better. It shows there is still some justice in the world."

A few days later, though, he was in the dumps again and found someone else to whom to pour out his woes.

"Sir!" he exclaimed, shedding tears. "You know, where I live is even worse than a pigsty. My master doesn't treat me like a human being; he treats his dog ten thousand times better. . . ."

"Confound him!" The other swore so loudly that he startled the slave. This other man was a fool.

"All I have to live in, sir, is a tumble-down, one-roomed hut, damp, cold and swarming with bedbugs. They bite me like anything when I lie down to sleep. The place is stinking and hasn't a single window. . . ."

"Can't you ask your master to have a window made?"

"How can I do that?"

"Well, show me what it's like."

The fool followed the slave to his hut, and began to pound the mud wall.

"What are you doing, sir?" The slave was horrified.

"I am opening a window for you."

"This won't do! The master will curse me."

"Let him!" The fool continued to pound away.

"Help! A bandit is breaking down the house! Come quickly or he will knock down the wall! . . ." Shouting and sobbing, the slave rolled frantically on the ground. A whole troop of slaves came out and drove away the fool. Roused by the outcry, the last one to come slowly out was the master.

"A bandit tried to break down our house. I gave the alarm, and together we drove him away!" The slave spoke respectfully and triumphantly.

"Good for you!" The master praised him.

Many callers came that day to express concern, among them the wise man.

"Sir, because I made myself useful, the master praised me. When you said the other day that things would improve, you were really showing foresight." He spoke very hopefully and happily.

"That's right . . ." replied the wise man, and seemed happy for his sake.

December 26, 1925

THE BLIGHTED LEAF

Reading Satula's* poems by lamplight, I have come across a dry, pressed maple leaf.

This carries me back to late autumn of last year. There was heavy frost one night and most of the trees shed their leaves, while one small maple in my courtyard turned crimson. I paced round the tree to take a good look at the leaves, which I had never examined so closely when they were green. Not all of them had turned red; indeed, most were a pale puce, and some still had dark green spots on a crimson background. There was one in which an insect had made a hole, which, fringed with black, stared at you like some bright eye from the chequered red, yellow and green.

"This leaf has been blighted!" I thought.

So I plucked it and slipped it inside the book I had just bought. I suppose I hoped to preserve for a little time this blighted motley of colours so soon to fall, to prevent its drifting away with the other leaves.

But tonight it lies yellow and waxen before my gaze, its eye less bright than last year. In a few more years, when its former hues have faded from memory, I may even forget why I put it in the book. It seems the chequered tints of blighted leaves soon to fall can remain for the shortest time only — to say nothing of those lush and green. Through my window

* Satula (1308-?), a Mongolian poet.

I see that the trees which can best withstand cold are already denuded of leaves, much more so the maple. In late autumn there may have been blighted leaves like last year's; but, unhappily, this year I had no time to appreciate autumn tints.

December 26, 1925

AMID PALE BLOODSTAINS

*In memory of some who are dead, some
who live, and some yet unborn.**

At present the creator is still a weakling.

In secret, he causes heaven and earth to change, but dares not destroy this world. In secret, he causes living creatures to die, but dares not preserve their dead bodies. In secret, he causes mankind to shed blood, but dares not keep the bloodstains fresh for ever. In secret, he causes mankind to suffer pain, but dares not let them remember it for ever.

He provides for his kind only, the weaklings among men; using deserted ruins and lonely tombs to set off rich mansions; using time to dilute pain and bloodstains; each day pouring out one cup of slightly sweetened bitter wine—not too little nor too much—to cause slight intoxication. This he gives to mankind so that those who drink it weep and sing, are both sober and drunk, conscious and unconscious, eager to live and eager to die. He must make all creatures wish to live on. He has not the courage yet to destroy mankind.

* This was written after the March 18 Incident, when the northern warlord, Tuan Chi-jui, ordered the police to fire on students and peaceful citizens of Peking, who were demonstrating against Japanese, English and American imperialist provocations. Forty-seven people were killed, and a hundred and fifty injured.

A few deserted ruins and a few lonely tombs are scattered over the earth, reflected by pale bloodstains; and there men taste their own vague pain and sorrow, as well as that of others. They will not spurn it, however, thinking it better than nothing; and they call themselves "victims of heaven" to justify their tasting this pain and sorrow. In apprehensive silence they await the coming of new pain and sorrow, new suffering which appals them, which they none the less thirst to meet.

All these are the loyal subjects of the creator. This is what he wants them to be.

A rebellious fighter has arisen from mankind, who, standing erect, sees through all the deserted ruins and lonely tombs of the past and the present. He remembers all the intense and unending agony; he gazes at the whole welter of clotted blood; he understands all that is dead and all that is living, as well as all yet unborn. He sees through the creator's game. And he will arise to save or destroy mankind, these loyal subjects of the creator.

The creator, the weakling, hides himself in shame. Then heaven and earth change colour in the eyes of the fighter.

April 8, 1926

THE AWAKENING

Like students going to school, the planes on their bombing missions fly over Peking each morning.* And each time I hear their engines attack the air I feel a certain slight tension, as if I were witnessing the invasion of Death, though this heightens my consciousness of the existence of Life.

After one or two muffled explosions, the planes drone and fly slowly off. There may be some casualties, but the world seems more peaceful than usual. The tender leaves of the poplar outside the window gleam dark gold in the sunlight; the blossom of the flowering plum is more glorious than yesterday. When I have cleared away the newspapers lying all over my bed and wiped off the light grey dust which has gathered on the table, my small, square study continues to live up to the description, "bright windows and spotless desk."

For some reason or other, I start to edit the manuscripts of young writers which have accumulated here. I want to go through them all. I read them in chronological order, and the spirits of these young people who scorn to use rouge or powder rise up in turn before me. They are fine, they have integrity — but, ah! they are so unhappy! They groan, become angry, and finally grow rough, my lovely youngsters.

* In April, 1926, when the warlord Feng Yu-hsiang was fighting Chang Tso-lin's clique, the latter's planes came several times to bomb Peking.

Their spirits are roughened by the onslaught of wind and dust, for theirs is the spirit of man, a spirit I love. I would gladly kiss this roughness dripping with blood but formless and colourless. In elegant, far-famed gardens filled with rare blossoms, demure and rosy girls are leisurely whiling away the time as the stork gives a cry and dense white clouds rise up. . . . This is all extremely enthralling, but I cannot forget I am living in the world of men.

And this suddenly reminds me of an incident: Two or three years ago, I was in the staff room at Peking University when a student whom I did not know came in. He handed me a package, then left without a word; and when I opened it, I found a copy of the magazine *Short Grass*.^{*} He said not a word, yet what a speaking silence, and what a rich gift that was! I am sorry *Short Grass* is not coming out any more; it seems merely to have served as the forerunner of *The Sunken Bell*.^{**} And *The Sunken Bell* is tolling alone in the caverns of wind and dust deep at the bottom of the human sea.

Though the wild thistle is virtually crushed to death, it will still bear one tiny flower. I remember how moved Tolstoy was by this, how it made him write a story. Of course, when plants in the arid desert reach out desperately with their roots to suck the water deep below the ground and form an emerald forest, they are struggling for their own survival. Yet the tired, parched travellers' hearts leap up at the sight, for they know they have reached a temporary resting place. Indeed, this evokes deep gratitude and sadness.

* A literary quarterly started by young writers in 1924.

** A literary weekly brought out in the autumn of 1925.

Under the heading "Miscellaneous," the editors of *The Sunken Bell* wrote: "Some people say our society is a desert. If this were really the case, though rather desolate it should give you a sense of tranquillity, though rather lonely it should give you a sense of infinity. It should not be so chaotic, gloomy and above all so changeful as it is."

Yes, the young people's spirits have risen up before me. They have grown rough, or are about to grow rough. But I love these spirits which bleed and suffer in silence, for they make me know I am in the world of men — I am living among men.

While I have been editing the sun has set, and I carry on by lamplight. All kinds of youth flash past before my eyes, though around me is nothing but dusk. Tired, I take a cigarette, quietly close my eyes in indeterminate thought, and have a long, long dream. I wake with a start. All around is still nothing but dusk; cigarette smoke rises in the motionless air like tiny specks of cloud in the summer sky, to be slowly transformed into indefinable shapes.

April 10, 1926

AH CHANG AND THE "BOOK OF HILLS AND SEAS"*

Mama Chang, as I have said elsewhere,** was the maid who brought me up, or — to give her a grander title — my nurse. That is what my mother and many others called her, for this sounded a little more polite. Only my grandmother called her "Ah Chang." I usually called her "Amah" without even adding the Chang. But when I was angry with her — upon learning she was the one who had killed my mole, for example — then I also called her "Ah Chang."

We had no one in our parts with the surname Chang; and since she was swarthy, plump and short, Chang (meaning "long" — *Translator*) was not used descriptively either. Nor was it her personal name. I remember she told me her name was Something Girl. What the epithet was I have forgotten, but it certainly was not "Long." And I never knew her surname. I recall her once telling me how she came by the name: Many, many years ago, our family had a very tall maid who was the real Ah Chang. Later on, when she left, this Something Girl of mine came to take her place; but because everyone was used to the name and did not want to change it, from that time on she became Mama Chang too.

* A collection of legends dating from the fourth to the second century B.C.

** In "Dog, Cat and Mouse," an earlier story from *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*.

Although it is bad to tell tales behind people's backs, if you want me to speak frankly I must admit I did not think much of her. What I most disliked was her habit of gossiping: she was always whispering into someone's ear. She would shake her forefinger up and down in the air, or point to the tip of her hearer's nose or her own. Whenever we had a minor storm in the house, I could not help suspecting that her tittle-tattle had something to do with it. She restricted my movements too. If I pulled up a weed or turned over a stone, she would say I was naughty and threaten to tell my mother. And in bed during the summer she would stretch out her arms and legs like a huge character 大 (ta), squeezing me so that I had no room to turn over, and my corner of the matting became hot after much lying on. But I could not push her over, nor could I wake her by shouting.

"You're so plump, Mama Chang, you must find the heat very trying. Isn't that an awkward position for sleeping in? . . ."

My mother put this question after hearing me complaining many times. And I knew it was a hint to my nurse to leave me more space. Ah Chang did not say anything. But that night when the heat woke me up, there was still a big character 大 spread-eagled over the bed, and one of her arms was thrown across my neck. It seemed to me there was really no way out.

She was most conventional in many ways, however, though most of her customs made me lose patience. The happiest time of the year was naturally New Year's Eve. After seeing the old year out, I put by my pillow the money wrapped in red paper which the grown-ups had given me. The next morning I could spend it as I pleased. I lay on my pillow eyeing the red packages, thinking of the small drum, the weap-

ons, the clay figures and the sugar Buddha that I would buy tomorrow. Then she came in, and put a Good-Luck Orange at the head of the bed.

"Remember this carefully, son!" she told me earnestly. "Tomorrow's the first day of the first month. When you open your eyes in the morning the first thing you must say is: 'Good luck, amah!' Remember? You *must* remember, because this decides the whole year's luck. Don't say anything else, mind! And after you've said that, you must eat a piece of Good-Luck Orange." She picked up the orange and flourished it in front of me. "Then —

"The whole year through
Luck will follow you!"

Even in my dreams I remembered it was New Year, and the next morning I woke specially early. As soon as I opened my eyes, I wanted to sit up. But at once she put out an arm to stop me. I looked at her in surprise, and saw her gazing at me anxiously.

Appealingly, as it were, she shook my shoulder. And suddenly I remembered.

"Good luck, amah."

"Good luck! Good luck to us every one! Clever boy! Good luck!" She was absolutely delighted, and laughed as she stuffed something icy cold into my mouth. When I had recovered from the shock, I realized that this must be the Good-Luck Orange. Now that all the ordeals to usher in New Year's Day were safely over, I could get up and play.

She taught me much other lore as well. For instance, if someone died, you should not say he was dead but "he has passed away." You should not enter a room where someone had died or a child had been born. If a grain of rice fell to the ground, you should pick it up, and the best thing was to eat it. On no account must you walk under the bamboo pole on

which trousers or pants were hanging out to dry. . . . There was more, but I have forgotten most of it; and what I remember most clearly are the strange New Year rites. In short, these were all such niggling trifles that the thought of them today still makes me lose patience.

On one occasion, though, I felt an unprecedented respect for her. She often told me stories about the Long Hairs.* And the Long Hairs she described were not only Hung Hsiu-chuan's troops but appeared to include all later bandits and rebels as well, with the exception of the modern revolutionaries, who did not exist then. She described the Long Hairs as most fearful beings, who talked in a way that no one could understand. According to her, when the Long Hairs entered our city, all my family fled to the seaside, just leaving a gate-keeper and an old woman who did the cooking to look after the property. Then, sure enough, a Long Hair came to our house. The old woman called him "Great King"—it seems this was the way to address the Long Hairs—and complained that she was starving.

"In that case," said the Long Hair with a grin, "you can have this to eat!" And he tossed over something round, with a small pigtail still attached to it—it was the gate-keeper's head! The old woman's nerve was never the same again. Whenever people spoke of this later, she would turn the colour of earth and beat her breast. "Aiya!" she would whimper. "It gave me such a turn! Such a turn it gave me. . . ."

I was not afraid, for I felt all this had nothing to do with me—I was not a gate-keeper. But she must have guessed my thoughts, for she said:

* See page 57.

"The Long Hairs would carry off little boys like you as well, to make little Long Hairs out of them. They carried off pretty girls too."

"Well, you'd be all right any way."

I was sure she must be quite safe, for she was neither a gate-keeper, nor a little boy, nor pretty. In fact, she had several scars on her neck where sores had been cauterized.

"How can you say such a thing?" she demanded sternly. "Were we no use to them then? They would carry us off as well. When government troops came to attack the city, the Long Hairs would make us take off our trousers and stand in a line on the city wall, for then the army's cannon could not be fired. If they fired then, the cannon would burst!"

This was certainly beyond my wildest dreams. I could not but be amazed. I had thought of her as nothing but a repository of troublesome conventions, never guessing she had this tremendous spiritual power. After this I felt a special respect for her, for surely she was too deep for me to fathom! If she stretched out her arms and legs at night and occupied the whole bed, that was quite understandable. I ought to make room for her.

Although my respect for her wore off by degrees, I believe it did not disappear completely till I discovered it was she who had killed my mole. I cross-examined her sternly on that occasion, and called her "Ah Chang" to her face. Since I was not a little Long Hair, and would not attack a city or let off a cannon, I need not be afraid of the cannon exploding — so why, thought I, need I be afraid of her?

But while mourning for my mole and avenging him, I was also longing for an illustrated copy of the *Book of Hills and Seas*. This longing had been aroused by a distant great-uncle of ours. A fat and

kindly old man, he liked to grow plants such as chloranthus or jasmine, or the rare silk tree which is said to have come from the north. His wife was just the reverse: she had no interest in flowers. Once she broke a branch of chloranthus by propping the bamboo for hanging out clothes on it; but her only reaction was to swear at the branch for breaking. This old man was a lonely soul with no one to talk to, so he liked children's company and often even called us his "young friends." In the compound where several branches of our clan lived, he was the only one with many books and unusual ones at that. He had volumes of the essays and poems written for the examinations, of course; but his was the only study where I could find Lu Chi's* *Commentaries on the Flora and Fauna in the Book of Songs*, and many other strange titles. My favourite in those days was *The Mirror of Flowers*** with all its illustrations. He told me there was an illustrated edition of the *Book of Hills and Seas* with pictures of man-faced beasts, nine-headed snakes, three-footed birds, men with wings, and headless monsters who used their teats as eyes. . . . Unfortunately, he happened to have mislaid it.

Eager as I was to look at pictures like this, I did not like to press him to find them for me. He was very indolent. And none of the other people I asked would give me a truthful answer. I had several hundred coppers of New Year money, but no opportunity to buy that book. The main street where books were sold was a long way from our house, and the New Year holiday was the only time in the year when I

* A writer of the third century A.D.

** A book on gardening by Chen Hao-tzu of the seventeenth century.

was able to go there to look around; but during that period the doors of both bookshops were firmly closed.

As long as I was playing it was not so bad, but the moment I sat down I remembered the illustrated *Book of Hills and Seas*.

Probably because I harped on the subject so much, even Ah Chang started asking what this *Book of Hills and Seas* was. I had never mentioned it to her, for I knew she was no scholar, so telling her would serve no purpose. Since she asked me, however, I told her.

About a fortnight or a month later, as I remember, four or five days after she had gone home on leave, she came back wearing a new blue cloth jacket. The moment she saw me she handed me a package.

"Here, son!" she said cheerfully. "I've bought you that *Book of Holy Seas* with pictures!"

This was like a thunderbolt. I was struck all of a heap. I hastened to take the package and unwrap the paper. There were four small volumes and, sure enough, when I flipped through the pages, the man-faced beast, the nine-headed snake . . . all of them were there.

This inspired me with a new respect. What others would not or could not do, she had been able to accomplish. She really did have tremendous spiritual power. My resentment against her for killing my mole vanished for good and all.

These four volumes were the first I ever possessed, and my most treasured book.

I can still see them today. But now it seems to me that both the printing and the engraving were extremely crude. The paper was yellow and the drawings very poor, consisting almost entirely of straight lines joined together — even the animals' eyes were oblong. But nevertheless this was my most

treasured book. There you could really find the man-faced beast, the nine-headed snake, the one-footed ox, the sack-like monster Ti Chiang, and Hsing Tien who had no head but "used his teats as eyes and his navel as mouth" and "danced with spear and shield!"

After this I began seriously collecting illustrated books. I acquired the *Phonetics and Illustrations for Erh Ya** and *Illustrations to the Book of Songs.*** I also had the *Paintings Collected by Tien Shih-tsai**** and *A Shipload of Painting and Poetry***** I bought another lithographed edition of the *Book of Hills and Seas* too, with illustrations and concluding verses to each chapter. The pictures were green and the characters red — much more handsome than my wood block edition — and I had this book till the year before last. It was a small edition with Ho Yi-hsing's***** commentary. As for the wood block edition, I cannot remember now when that was lost.

My nurse, Mama Chang or Ah Chang, must have departed this life a good thirty years ago. I never found out her name or history. All I know is that she had an adopted son, so she was probably left a widow very early.

Dark, kindly Mother Earth, may her spirit ever rest peacefully in your bosom!

March 10

* An ancient Chinese lexicon, probably dating from the second century B.C. Its author is unknown.

** A Japanese book of the eighteenth century.

*** A collection of the work of Chinese and Japanese painters, printed in 1835.

**** Paintings of the Lung Ching and Wan Li periods (1567-1620) of the Ming Dynasty.

***** 1757-1825. A famous Ching Dynasty scholar.

THE FAIR OF THE FIVE FIERCE GODS

In addition to New Year and the other festivals, we children looked forward to the temple fairs in honour of certain gods. But my home was rather out of the way, so not till the afternoon did the processions pass our door, by which time the retinue had dwindled away until there was almost nothing left of it. Often, after hours of craning our necks and waiting, all we saw was some dozen men running hastily past carrying an effigy of a god with a golden, blue or crimson face. And that was all.

I always hoped that *this* procession would be bigger and better than the last, but the result was invariably more or less the same. And all I was left with was a souvenir bought for one copper before the god passed by — a whistle made of a bit of clay, a scrap of coloured paper, a split bamboo and two or three cock's feathers. This whistle, known as a "tootle-toot," produced a piercing blast, and I blew it lustily for two or three days.

Now when I read Chang Tai's* *Reminiscences*, I am struck by the splendour of temple fairs in his time, even if these Ming Dynasty writers do tend to exaggerate. We still welcome the dragon king today when we pray for rain, but it is very simply done,

* A seventeenth century writer.

with only some dozen men carrying a huge silk dragon and making it twist and coil, while some village boys dress up as sea monsters. In the old days they acted plays, and it was most spectacular. Here is Chang Tai's description of a pageant from *Water Margin*.*

"... They went out in all directions to find one fellow who was short and swarthy, another who was tall and hefty, a mendicant friar, a fat monk, a stout woman and a slender one. They looked for a pale face too and a head set askew, a red moustache and a handsome beard, a strong, dark man and one with ruddy cheeks and a beard that covered his chest. They searched high and low in the town, and if they failed to find any character they went outside the city walls, to the villages and hamlets in the hills, even to neighbouring prefectures and counties. A high price was paid to the thirty-six men who played the heroes of Liangshan; but each looked his part to the life, and they went out in force on horseback and on foot. . . ."

Who could resist watching such a lifelike pageant of the men and women of days gone by? The pity is that such brave shows disappeared long ago along with the Ming Dynasty.

Though these processions were not prohibited by the authorities — unlike women's long gowns in Shanghai today or the discussion of politics in Peking — still, women and children were not allowed to watch them, and educated people or the so-called literati seldom went to look on either. Only loafers and idlers would gather before the temple or yamen to watch the fun; and since most of my knowledge of these festivities comes from their accounts it is not the first hand

* The famous fourteenth century novel by Shih Nai-an, describing the peasant revolt of Liangshan in the twelfth century.

observation so much valued by researchers.* I do, however, remember once witnessing a rather fine show myself. First came a boy on horseback called The Announcer. Then, after a considerable interval, The High Pole arrived. This was a great bamboo pole to which a long banner was attached, and it was carried in both hands by a huge fat man dripping with perspiration. When in the mood he would balance the pole on his head or teeth, or even on the tip of his nose. He was followed by stilt-walkers, children on platforms carried by men, and other children on horseback, all masquerading as characters from operas. There were people dressed in red like felons, too, loaded with cangues and chains, some of whom were also children. To me each part was glorious and each participant extremely lucky — I no doubt envied them this chance to show off. I used to wish I could have some serious illness, so that my mother would go to the temple to promise the god that I would masquerade as a felon. . . . So far, though, I have failed to have any association with these processions.

Once I was going to Tungkuan Village for the Fair of the Five Fierce Gods. This was a great occasion in my childhood, for this fair was the grandest in the whole county and Tungkuan Village was very far from my home, more than sixty *li* by boat after you left the town. There were two remarkable temples there. One was the Temple to Mistress Mei, the virgin mentioned in the *Tales of Liao Chai*** who remained un-

* This and various other allusions in these essays are to some reactionary intellectuals who supported the warlords in their repression of progressives, and posed as "upright gentlemen," champions of justice, or scholars dedicated to research work. Two of the most prominent members of this clique were Professor Chen Yuan and the poet Hsu Chih-mo.

** A collection of short stories by Pu Sung-ling (1630-1715).

married after the death of her betrothed and became a goddess after she died, but then appropriated someone else's husband. On the shrine, sure enough, the images of a young man and woman were smiling at each other, counter to all the laws of propriety. The other was the Temple of the Five Fierce Gods, the very name of which was strange enough. According to those with a passion for research, these were the Wu Tung Gods.* There is no conclusive proof of this, however. The images were five men, who did not look particularly fierce; and behind them sat five wives in a row, this intermingling of sexes falling far short of the strict segregation practised in Peking theatres. In fact, this was counter to all the laws of propriety too; but since these were the Five Fierce Gods, nothing could be done about it. They were obviously an exception to the rule.

Since Tungkuan Village was a long way from the town, we all got up at dawn. The big boat with three windows booked the night before was already moored at the harbour, and to it our man started carrying the chairs, food, a stove for brewing tea, and a hamper of cakes. Laughing and skipping, I urged him to get a move on. Suddenly from his respectful expression I knew there was something up. I looked round and saw my father standing behind me.

"Go and fetch your book," he said slowly.

The book he meant was the *Rhymed History*** which served as my primer. I had no other book. In our district children started school when their years were odd not even: that is how I know I must have been seven at the time.

* Licentious deities worshipped in certain villages in the past.

** By Wang Ssu-yun of the Ching Dynasty. This book gave a rhymed account of Chinese history to the end of the Ming Dynasty.

With trepidation I fetched the book. He made me sit beside him at the table in the centre of the hall and read to him sentence by sentence. Inwardly quaking, I read to him sentence by sentence.

Two sentences made one line, and I must have read twenty or thirty lines.

"Learn them by heart," he said. "If you cannot recite them correctly, you will not be allowed to go to the fair."

This said, he stood up and walked into his room.

I felt as if someone had doused me with icy water. But what could I do? Naturally I had to read and re-read, and force myself to memorize—I would have to recite it too.

"In the beginning was Pan Ku,
Born of primeval void;
He was the first to rule the world,
The chaos to divide."

That is the kind of book it was. The first four lines are all I can remember. I have forgotten the rest, including of course the twenty or thirty lines I was forced to memorize that day. I remember hearing it said at the time that studying the *Rhymed History* was more useful than studying the *Thousand Characters* or the *Hundred Surnames*,* for from it you could learn the outline of all history past and present. It is naturally a very good thing to know the outline of all history past and present. My trouble was that I could not understand a word.

"In the beginning was Pan Ku," I read.

"In the beginning was Pan Ku."

I read on and learned it by heart.

"In the beginning was Pan Ku,
Born of primeval void. . . ."

*Two primers for children in the old schools.

Everything needed had been carried to the boat. The noise and bustle at home had turned to silence. The morning sun shone on the western wall. The weather was clear and fine. Mother, the servant, my nurse Mama Chang or Ah Chang—none of them could rescue me. They had to wait in silence till I had learned my lesson and could recite it. In the utter stillness it seemed as if iron pincers would thrust out from my head to seize that "Born of primeval void," and all the other lines. And I could hear my voice quaver as I read desperately on, quaver like a cricket's chirping on a late autumn night.

Everybody was waiting. The sun had risen even higher.

Suddenly I felt a surge of confidence. I stood up, picked up the book and went to my father's study to recite all those lines in one breath. I recited as if in a dream.

"Good. You may go." Father nodded his head as he spoke.

At once everyone sprang into action, breaking into smiles as we set out for the harbour. The servant carried me high as if to congratulate me on my success as he strode ahead of the rest.

I was not as happy as they were, though. After the boat cast off, the riverside scenery, the cakes in the hamper, the bustle of the fair when we reached Tungkuan Village—none of these seemed to me very interesting.

Now everything else is forgotten, vanished without a trace. Only my recitation from the *Rhymed History* is as clear in my mind as if it happened yesterday.

Even now, when I think of it, I still wonder why my father made me learn a lesson by heart at that particular time.

May 25, 1926



Wu Chang, drawn and inscribed by Lu Hsun

WU CHANG, OR LIFE-IS-TRANSIENT

If the gods who parade at temple fairs have power of life and death—no, this is wrongly put, for all gods in China seem able to kill men at will—if their task rather, like that of the guardian god of a city or the Emperor of the East Mountain, is to control human fate, in their retinue you will find some unusual figures: ghostly attendants, the ghostly king, and Wu Chang, or Life-is-Transient.

These spirits are usually impersonated by uncouth fellows or country bumpkins. The ghostly attendants and their king wear red and green and go barefoot, while on their blue faces are painted fish scales—perhaps the scales of a dragon or some other creature—I am not quite clear on this point. The ghostly attendants carry steel prongs with rings attached which clang when shaken; and the ghostly king carries a small tiger-head tally. According to tradition, the king should walk with one foot; but since he is simply a country bumpkin after all, even though he has painted his face with the scales of a fish or some other creature, he still has to walk with two feet. Hence spectators are not much impressed by these ghosts and pay scant attention to them, with the exception of some devout old women and their grandchildren, who treat all spirits with proper reverence in order that none of them may feel left out.

As for the rest of us—I believe I am speaking for

others as well as myself—what we must enjoy watching is Wu Chang. Not only is he lively and full of fun; the mere fact of his being completely in white among that gaudy throng makes him stand out like a stork in a flock of fowls. A glimpse of his tall white paper hat and his tattered palm-leaf fan in the distance makes everyone feel pleasantly excited.

Of all spirits he is the nearest and dearest to men, and we often come across him. In the temple of the guardian god of a city or the Emperor of the East Mountain, for example, behind the main hall is a dark room called the Court of Hell; and barely perceptible through the gloom are the images of ghosts: the one who died by hanging, the one who fell to his death, the one who was killed by a tiger, the one who expired in the examination cell . . . but the long white figure you see as you enter is Wu Chang. Though I once paid a visit to the Court of Hell, I was much too timid then to take a good look. I have heard that he carries an iron chain in one hand, because he is the summoner of dead men's spirits. Tradition has it that the Court of Hell in the temple of the Emperor of the East Mountain in Fanchiang* was strangely constructed with a movable plank just inside the threshold. When you entered and stepped on one end of this plank, Wu Chang would fly over from the other end and throw his iron chain neatly round your neck; but after a man had been frightened to death in this way they nailed the plank down. Even in my young days it no longer moved.

If you want to take a good look at him, you will find his picture in *The Jade Calendar*.** It may not

* A town to the east of Shaohsing.

** An old religious book, probably dating from the Sung Dynasty, which describes the torments of hell as a warning to mortals.

be in the abridged version, but in the complete version you are sure to find it. He is wearing deep mourning and straw sandals, with a straw belt round his waist and a string of paper money round his neck. He holds the tattered palm-leaf fan, a chain and an abacus; his shoulders are slightly hunched and his hair is dishevelled; his eyebrows and eyes tilt down at the sides like the Chinese character 人 (pa). He wears a peaked, rectangular hat, which, reckoned in proportion to the portrait as a whole, must be about two feet high. In front of the hat, where old and young gentlemen left over from the Ching Dynasty would fasten a pearl or jewel on their melon-shaped caps, are these words written vertically: Lucky to meet. According to another version, the words are: You are here too. This is the same phrase sometimes found on the horizontal tablet over the Court of the Venerable Pao.* Whether Wu Chang wrote these words on his hat himself or the King of Hell wrote them for him I have not yet been able to ascertain in the course of my researches.

The Jade Calendar has Life-is-Transient's opposite number, a ghost similarly equipped whose name is Death-is-Predestined. He also appears in temple fairs, where he is wrongly known as Death-is-Transient. Since his face and clothes are black, nobody cares to look at him. He too appears in the Court of Hell, where he stands facing the wall with a funereal air about him—a genuine case of “knocking against the wall.”** All who come in to worship and burn

* Pao Cheng, prefect of Kaifeng, capital of the Northern Sung Dynasty (960-1127). Loved by the people for his justice, after his death he was regarded as one of the ten kings of hell.

** In previous articles Lu Hsun described himself as always “knocking against the wall” when he tried to do what he thought right.

incense are supposed to rub his back, and this is said to rid you of bad luck. I rubbed his back too when I was small, but I never seem to have been free of bad luck. Perhaps if I had not rubbed it my luck would have been still worse. This again I have not yet been able to ascertain in the course of my researches.

I have made no study of the canons of Hinayana Buddhism, but I hear that in Indian Buddhist lore you have the god Yama and the ox-headed devil, both of whom reign in hell. As for Mr. Transient, who summons spirits, his origin cannot be traced to ancient times; yet the saying "life is transient" is a common one. I suppose once this concept reached China, we personified it. So Wu Chang is actually a Chinese invention.

But why is everyone pleasantly excited to see him?

When a great scholar or famous man appears anywhere, he has only to flourish his pen to make the place a "model district."* At the end of the Han Dynasty Yu Fan praised my native place; but that after all was too long ago, for later this district gave birth to the notorious "Shaohsing pettifoggers."** Of course, not all of us—old and young, men and women—are pettifoggers in Shaohsing. We have quite a few other "low types" too. And you cannot expect these low types to express themselves in such wonderful gibberish as this: "We are traversing a narrow and dangerous path, with a vast and boundless marshland on the left and a vast and boundless desert on the right, while our goal in front looms darkly through

* Professor Chen Yuan described his native place, Wusih, as the "model district" of China.

** Many of the pettifogging yamen clerks in the old days were natives of Shaohsing, hence the term "Shaohsing pettifogger." In an attack on Lu Hsun, Professor Chen Yuan declared he had the temperament of a Shaohsing pettifogger.

the mist.”* That would be expecting too much. Yet in some instinctive way they see their path very clearly to that darkly looming goal: betrothal, marriage, rearing children, and death. Of course, I am speaking here of my native district only. The case must be quite different in model districts. Many of them—I mean the low types of my unworthy district—have lived and suffered, been slandered and blackmailed so long that they know that in this world of men there is only one association which upholds justice,** and even that looms darkly; inevitably, then, they look forward to the nether regions. Most people consider themselves unjustly treated. In real life “upright gentlemen” can fool no one. And if you ask ignorant folk they will tell you without reflection: Fair judgements are given in hell!

Of course, when you think of its pleasures life seems worth living; but when you think of its sorrows Wu Chang may not be unwelcome. High or low, rich or poor alike, we must all appear empty-handed before the King of Hell, who will right all wrongs and punish evil-doers. Even low types sometimes stop to reflect: What sort of life have I led? Have I leapt with rage? Have I stabbed other people in the back?*** In Wu Chang’s hand is a big abacus, and no amount of superior airs will do a man any good. We demand undiluted justice for others, yet even in

* Quoted from an open letter from Professor Chen Yuan to Hsu Chih-mo.

** Referring to the reactionary Association of Educational Circles for Upholding Justice, set up in Peking in 1925. Its members, mostly professors, condemned Lu Hsun and others for supporting the students of the Peking Women’s Normal College against their principal and the minister of education.

*** In his open letter to Hsu Chih-mo, Professor Chen Yuan maintained that Lu Hsun attacked people in a dastardly way, but if he himself was criticized he “leapt with rage.”

the infernal regions we hope to find some mercy for ourselves. But when all is said, this is hell. And the King of Hell, the ox-headed devil, and the horse-faced devil invented by the Chinese, are all working honestly away at one job, though they have published no significant articles in the papers. Before becoming ghosts, honest people who think of the future have to search for fragments of mercy in the sum total of justice; and to them Mr. Life-is-Transient appears rather lovable.

You cannot see Wu Chang's charm from the clay figure in the temple or the printed picture in the book. The best way is to see him in the opera. And ordinary opera will not do: it must be the Great Drama or Maudgalyayana Drama. Chang Tai has described in his *Reminiscences* what a fine spectacle the Maudgalyayana was, taking two to three days to stage one play. It was already not nearly so grand in my young days, but just like an ordinary Great Drama, starting in the evening and ending at dawn the next day. Such operas were performed to honour the gods and avert calamities, and each one had an evil-doer who met his end at dawn, when the cup of his sins was full and the King of Hell issued a warrant for his arrest. This was the point at which Wu Chang appeared on the stage.

I remember sitting in a boat below such a stage, with the audience in a different mood from usual. Generally, as the night wore on the crowd grew listless, but at this point they showed fresh interest. Wu Chang's tall paper hat which had been hanging in one corner of the stage was now carried inside, and the musicians took up a peculiar instrument and prepared to blow it lustily. This instrument looked like a trumpet, being long and slender, seven or eight feet in length; and it must have been a favourite with

ghosts, for it was only played when there were ghosts on the stage. When you blew it, it blared: Nhatu, nhatu, nhatututuu! And we called it the Maudgalyayana trumpet.

As the crowd watched eagerly for the fall of the evil-doer, Wu Chang made his appearance. His dress was simpler than in the paintings, and he had neither chain nor abacus; he was simply an uncouth fellow all in white, with white face, red lips and knitted, jet black eyebrows so that it was hard to tell whether he was laughing or crying. Upon his entrance he had to sneeze a hundred and eight times and break wind a hundred and eight times before introducing himself. I am sorry I cannot remember all he said, but one passage went something like this:

The King of Hell issued a warrant,
And ordered me to arrest the scabby head next door.

When I asked who he was, I found that he was
my cousin's son.

What was his illness? Typhoid and dysentery.
Who was the doctor? The son of Chen Nien-yi
at Hsiafang Bridge.

What was his medicine? Aconite, hyssop and
cinnamon.

The first dose brought on a cold sweat;
The second made his legs turn stiff;
His mother was weeping so sadly
That I let him come to life for a little while;
But the king said I had been bribed;
He had me bound and given forty strokes!

The King of Hell does not cut too good a figure in this description, misjudging Wu Chang's character as he did. Still, the fact that he detected that Wu Chang's nephew had been allowed to come to life for a little while shows him not to be lacking in the attri-

butes of a just and omniscient god. However, the punishment left our Wu Chang with an ineradicable impression of injustice. As he spoke of it he knitted his brows even more and, grasping his tattered palm-leaf fan and hanging his head, he started to dance like a duck swimming in the water.

Nhatu, nhatu, nhatu-nhatu-nhatututuu! The Maudgalyayana trumpet also wailed on in protest against this unendurable wrong.

So Wu Chang made up his mind:

Now I shall let no man off,

Not though he is surrounded by a wall of
bronze or iron,

Not though he is a kinsman of the emperor
himself!

He has no mercy now. But this hardness was forced upon him by the punishment he received from the King of Hell. Of all the ghosts, he is the only one with any human feeling. If we ever become ghosts, he will naturally be the only one with whom we can make friends.

I still remember distinctly how in my home town, with those low types, I enjoyed watching this ghostly yet human, just yet merciful, frightening yet lovable Wu Chang. We enjoyed the distress or laughter on his face, the bravado and jokes that fell from his lips.

The Wu Chang in temple fairs was not quite the same as on the stage. He went through certain motions but did not speak, as he followed a sort of clown who carried a plate of food. Wu Chang wanted to eat, but the clown would not give him the food. There were two additional characters as well—the wife and the child. All low types have this common failing: they like to do to others as they would be done by. Hence they will not let even a ghost be lonely, but pair them all off; and Wu Chang was no

exception. His better half was a handsome though rather countrified woman who was known as Sister-in-law Wu Chang. Judging by this mode of address, Wu Chang must belong to our own generation. No wonder he did not give himself any professorial airs. Then there was a boy in a smaller tall hat and smaller white clothes. Though only a child, his shoulders were already slightly hunched up while his eyes and eyebrows slanted down. Obviously he was Wu Chang Junior, though everyone called him Ah-ling and showed him little respect—perhaps because he was Sister-in-law Wu Chang's son by a former husband? In that case, though, how could he look so like Wu Chang? Well, it is hard to fathom the ways of ghosts and spirits; and we shall simply have to leave it at that. As for why Wu Chang had no children of his own, that is easy to explain this year. Spirits can foresee the future. He must have feared that if he had many children gossips would try to use this as circumstantial evidence to prove that *he* had accepted Russian roubles. Hence he not only studies birth control but practises it as well.

The scene with the food is called "The Send Off." Because Wu Chang is the summoner of spirits, the relatives of anyone who dies have to give him a farewell feast. As for not allowing him to eat, this is just a bit of fun in the temple fairs and not the case in fact. But everyone likes to have a bit of fun with Wu Chang, because he is so frank, outspoken and human. If you want a true friend, you will find few better than him.

Some say he is a man who goes to the spirit world, in other words, a human being whose spirit serves in hell while he is asleep. That is why he looks so human. I remember a man who lived in a cottage not far from my home, who claimed he was such a

Wu Chang, and incense and candles were burnt outside his door. I noticed, though, he had an unusually ghostly expression. Could it be that when he became a ghost in the nether regions his expression became more human? Well, it is hard to fathom the ways of ghosts and spirits, and we shall simply have to leave it at that. .

June 23, 1926

FROM HUNDRED PLANT GARDEN TO THREE FLAVOUR STUDY

Behind our house was a great garden commonly known as Hundred Plant Garden. It has long since been sold, with the house to the descendants of Chu Hsi,* and the last time I saw it, already seven or eight years ago, I am sure there were only weeds there. But it was my paradise when I was a child.

I need not speak of the green vegetables plots, the slippery stone coping round the well, the tall honey locust tree, or the purple mulberries. I need not speak of the long shrilling of the cicadas among the leaves, the fat wasps couched in the flowering rape, or the nimble skylarks who soared suddenly up from the grass to the sky. Just the foot of the low mud wall around the garden was a source of unfailing interest. Here field crickets would drone away, while house crickets chirruped merrily. Turning over a broken brick, you might find a centipede. There were Spanish flies as well, and if you pressed a finger on their backs, they emitted puffs of vapour from behind. Milkwort interwove with climbing fig, which had fruit shaped like the calyx of a lotus, while the milkwort had swollen tubers. Folk said that some of these tubers were shaped like human beings, and if you ate them you would become immortal, so I kept

* A well-known Sung Dynasty philosopher. This simply means that the family's name was Chu.

on pulling them up. By uprooting one I pulled out those next to it, and in this way spoilt part of the mud wall, but I never found a tuber shaped like a human being. If you were not afraid of thorns, you could pick raspberries too, like strings of little coral beads. They were sweet yet tart, with a much finer colour and flavour than mulberries.

I did not go into the long grass, because there was said to be a huge tiger snake in the garden.

Mama Chang once told me a story. There was formerly a scholar who was staying in an old temple to study. One evening when he was enjoying the cool of the courtyard, he heard someone call his name. Calling out in return, he looked round and saw the head of a beautiful woman over the wall. She smiled, then disappeared. He was very happy, till the old monk who came to chat with him every evening discovered what had happened. Detecting an evil influence on his face, he declared the scholar must have seen the Beautiful Woman Snake—a creature with a human head and the body of a snake, who was able to call men's names. If a man answered, the snake would come that night to devour him. The scholar was nearly frightened to death, of course; but the monk said all would be well, and gave him a little box, assuring him that if he put this by his pillow he could sleep quite peacefully. But though he did as he was told, it is not surprising that he could not sleep. That midnight, to be sure, with a hiss and a rustle the monster came! There was a sound like wind and rain outside the door, and as he was shaking with fright he heard a scratch, and a golden streak flew out from beside his pillow. Then outside the door utter silence fell, and the golden streak flew back to nestle down in the box. And after that? After

that the old monk told him this was a flying centipede which could suck out the brains of a snake—the Beautiful Woman Snake had been killed by it.

The moral of this was: If a strange voice calls your name, you must on no account answer!

This story brought home to me the perils with which human life is fraught. When I sit outside on a summer night I often feel apprehensive and dare not look at the wall, but long for a box with a flying centipede in it like that old monk's. This was often in my thoughts when I walked to the edge of the long grass in Hundred Plant Garden. Up to the present I have never procured one, but neither have I encountered the tiger snake or the Beautiful Woman Snake. Of course, strange voices often call my name; but the owners have never proved to be Beautiful Woman Snakes.

In winter the garden was relatively dull; but as soon as it snowed, that was a different story. Imprinting a snow man (by pressing your body on the snow) or building snow Buddhas required appreciative audiences; and since this was a deserted garden where visitors seldom came, such games were out of place here. I was therefore reduced to catching birds. This could not be done after a light fall of snow. The ground had to be covered for one or two days, so that the birds had gone hungry for some time. You swept a patch clear of snow, propped up a big bamboo sieve on a short stick and sprinkled some rice husks beneath it, then tied a long string to the stick and held it at a distance, waiting for the birds to come. When they were under the sieve, you tugged the string and trapped them. Most of those caught were sparrows or the white-throated wagtails, who were very wild and would not live more than a day in captivity.

It was Jun-tu's father who taught me this method, but I was not much of a hand at it. I saw birds hop under my sieve, yet when I pulled the string and ran over to look there was usually nothing there, and after long efforts I would catch only three or four. In much less time Jun-tu's father could catch dozens, which he put in his bag where they cheeped and jostled each other. I asked him once the reason for my failure. With a quiet smile, he said:

"You're too impatient. You don't wait for them to get to the middle."

I don't know why my family decided to send me to school, or why they chose the school reputed the strictest in town. Perhaps it was because I had spoiled the mud wall by uprooting milkwort, perhaps because I had thrown bricks into the Liangs' courtyard next door, perhaps because I had climbed the stone coping round the well to jump off it . . . there is no means of knowing. At all events, I would no longer be able to go so often to Hundred Plant Garden. Adieu, my crickets! Adieu, my raspberries and climbing figs!

Less than half a *li* east of our house, across a stone bridge, was my teacher's home. You went in through a black-lacquered bamboo gate, and the third room was the study. In the centre hung a placard on which was written: Three Flavour Study. Under this was a picture of a very fat spotted deer lying beneath an old tree. Since there was no shrine to Confucius, we kowtowed to the placard and the deer. The first kowtow was for Confucius, the second for our teacher.

When we kowtowed the second time, our teacher bowed in return from the side. He was a thin, tall old man with a grizzled beard, who wore large spectacles. And I had the greatest respect for him, for I had heard he was the most upright, honourable and erudite man in our town.

I forget who told me that Tungfang Shuo* was another great scholar who knew of an insect called *kuai tsai*,** the incarnation of some unjustly slain ghost, which would vanish if you poured alcohol over it. I longed to learn the details of this story, but Ah Chang could not enlighten me, for Ah Chang after all was not a great scholar. Now my chance had come, for I could ask my teacher.

"What is this insect *kuai tsai*, sir?" I asked hastily after a new lesson, just before returning to my seat.

"I don't know!" He seemed not at all pleased. Indeed, he looked rather angry.

Then I realized students should not ask questions like this, but concentrate on studying. Since he was such a learned scholar, of course he must know the answer. When he said he did not know, it meant he would not tell me. My seniors were often like this, as I knew from many similar experiences.

So I concentrated on studying. At midday I practised calligraphy, in the evening I made couplets. For the first few days the teacher was very stern, though later he treated me better; but by degrees he increased the amount of reading to be done and the number of characters in each line of the couplets—from three to five, and finally to seven.

There was a garden behind Three Flavour Study. Although it was small, you could climb the terrace there to pick winter plum, or look for cicadas' skins on the ground or on the cassia trees. Best of all was catching flies to feed ants, for that did not make any noise. But it was no use too many of us slipping out

* A courtier of the time of Emperor Wu who reigned from 140 to 87 B.C. of the Han Dynasty, famous for his jokes.

** This means "How extraordinary!"

into the garden at the same time or staying out too long, for the teacher would shout from the study:

"Where has everyone gone?"

Then everyone would slip back one after the other: it was no use all going back together. He had a ferule which he seldom used, and a method of punishing students by making them kneel, which was also seldom used. Generally, he simply glared round several times and shouted:

"Read your books!"

Then all of us would read at the top of our voices, with a roar like a seething cauldron.

One read: "Is humanity far? When I seek it, it is here."

A second read: "Laughing at someone whose front teeth were out, he said: 'The hole for the dog is wide open.'"

A third read: "On the upper ninth let the dragon hide himself and bide his time."

A fourth read: "Its soil is poor, its tribute oranges and pomelos."*

.
The teacher read aloud too. Later our voices grew lower, but he read on as loudly as ever:

"The iron sceptre waves, and all people stand amazed. —Aha!—The golden goblet brims over with wine, but a thousand cups will not make him drunk. —Aha!—"

I suspected this must be the finest literature, for whenever he reached this point he would smile to

* The first, third and fourth quotations, with slight modifications, come from three well-known Confucian classics: *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Book of Change* and *The Book of History*. The second comes from *The Jade Forest*, a school primer containing short historical allusions.

himself, throw back his head a little, shake it, and lean further and further back.

When our teacher was completely absorbed in his reading, that was most convenient for us. Some boys would then stage puppet shows with paper helmets on their fingers. I used to draw, using Chingchuan paper to trace the illustrations in various novels, just as you trace calligraphy. By the time I had studied a good many books, I had also traced a good many illustrations. I never became a good student, but I made not a little progress as an artist; for I had a big volume each of illustrations from *Suppressing the Bandits** and *The Pilgrimage to the West***. Later, because I needed money, I sold them to a rich classmate whose father sold the paper coins used at funeral. I hear he is now the manager of the shop and will soon rise to the rank of one of the local gentry. I suppose my drawings must have vanished long ago.

September 18

* A novel by Yu Chung-hua (1794-1849) written as a sequel to *Shui Hu*, condemning the Liangshan heroes.

** A famous Ming Dynasty novel by Wu Cheng-en.

FATHER'S ILLNESS

It must be over ten years now since this story of a well-known doctor was the talk of the town in S—:

He charged one dollar forty a visit, ten dollars for an emergency call, double the amount for a night call, and double again for a trip outside the city. One night the daughter of a family living outside the city fell dangerously ill. They sent to ask him out there and, because he had more money at the time than he knew what to do with, he refused to go for less than a hundred dollars. They had to agree to this. Once there, though, he simply gave her a perfunctory looking over.

"It isn't serious," he said.

Then he made out a prescription, took his hundred dollars and left.

Apparently the patient's family was very rich, for the next day they asked him out there again. The master of the house met him at the door with a smile.

"Yesterday evening we gave her your medicine, doctor," he said, "and she's much better. So we've asked you to have another look at her."

He took him as before into the bedroom, and a maid drew the patient's hand outside the bed-curtain. The doctor placed his fingers on her wrist, and found it icy cold, without any pulse.

"Um," he said, nodding. "I understand this illness."

Quite calmly he walked to the table, took out a prescription form and wrote on it:

"Pay the bearer one hundred silver dollars."

Beneath he signed his name and affixed his seal.

"This illness looks rather serious, doctor," said the master of the house behind him. "I think the medicine should be a little more potent."

"Very well," said the doctor. And he wrote another prescription:

"Pay the bearer two hundred silver dollars."

Beneath he signed his name and affixed his seal again.

This done, the master of the house put away the prescription and saw him politely out.

I had dealings with this famous physician for two whole years, because he came every other day to attend my father. Although already very well-known, he had not yet more money than he knew what to do with; still, his fee was already one dollar forty a visit. In large towns today a ten dollars fee is not considered exorbitant; but in those days one dollar forty was a great sum, by no means easy to raise — especially when it fell due every other day. He probably *was* unique in some respects. It was generally agreed his prescriptions were unusual. I know nothing about medicine: what struck me was how hard his "adjuvants" were to find. Each new prescription kept me busy for some time. First I had to buy the medicine, then look for the adjuvant. He never used such common ingredients as two slices of fresh ginger, or ten bamboo leaves minus the tips. At best it was reed roots, and I had to go to the river to dig them up; and when it came to sugar-cane which had seen three years of frost, I would have to search for two or three days at the least. But, strange to say, I believe my quest was always successful in the end.

It was generally agreed that herein lay his skill. There once was a patient whom no drugs could cure,

but when he met a certain Dr. Yeh Tien-shih, all this doctor did was to add phoenix-tree leaves as the adjuvant to the old prescription. After one dose, the patient was cured. Because it was autumn then, and the phoenix-tree is the first to feel the approach of autumn, where all other drugs had failed Dr. Yeh could now use the spirit of autumn to cure the patient. . . . Although this was not clear to me, I was thoroughly impressed, and realized that all effective drugs must be difficult to get. Those who want to become immortals even have to risk their lives to go deep into the mountains to pluck the herb of long life.

After two years of this, I gradually came to know this famous physician fairly well; indeed we were almost friends. Father's dropsy grew daily worse, till it looked as if he would have to keep to his bed, and by degrees I lost faith in such remedies as sugar-cane which had seen three years of frost, and was not nearly as zealous as before in finding and preparing adjuvants. One day just at this time, when the doctor called, after inquiring after my father's illness he told us very frankly:

"I've used all the knowledge I have. There is a Mr. Chen Lien-ho here, who knows more than I do. I advise you to consult him. I'll write you a letter. This illness isn't serious, though. It's just that he can cure it much more quickly. . . ."

The whole household seemed rather unhappy that day, but I saw him out as respectfully as ever to his sedan-chair. When I went in again, I found my father looking very put out, talking it over with everyone and declaring that there was probably no hope for him. Because this doctor had treated the illness for two years to no purpose, and knew the patient too well, he could not help feeling rather embarrassed now that things had reached a crisis: that was why he

had recommended someone else, washing his hands of the whole affair. But what else could we do? It was a fact that the only other well-known doctor in our town was Chen Lien-ho. So the next day we engaged his services.

Chen Lien-ho's fee was also one dollar forty. But whereas our first well-known doctor's face was plump and round, his was plump and long: this was one great difference between them. Their use of medicine was different too. Our first well-known doctor's prescriptions could be prepared by one person, but no single person could cope satisfactorily with Dr. Chen's, because his prescriptions always included a special pill or powder or an extra-special adjuvant.

Not once did he use reed roots or sugar-cane that had seen three years of frost. Most often it was "a pair of crickets," with a note in small characters at the side: "They must be an original pair, from the same burrow." So it seems even insects must be chaste: if they marry again after losing their mates they forfeit even the right to be used as medicine. This task, however, presented no difficulties to me. In Hundred Plant Garden I could catch ten pairs easily. I tied them with a thread and dropped them alive into the boiling pan, and that was that. But then there was "ten Ardisia berries." Nobody knew what that was. I asked the pharmacy, I asked some peasants, I asked the vendor of herb medicines, I asked old people, I asked scholars, I asked a carpenter: but they all simply shook their heads. Last of all I remembered that distant great-uncle of mine, the old fellow who liked to grow flowers and trees, and hurried over to ask him. Sure enough, he knew: it was a shrub which grew at the foot of trees deep in the mountain. It had small red berries like coral beads, and was usually known as Never-Grow-Up.

You wear out iron shoes in hunting round,
When all the time it's easy to be found!

Now we had the adjuvant, but there was still a special pill: broken-drum-bolus. Broken-drum-boluses were made from the leather of worn-out drums. Since the name "dropsy" is close to "drum," the leather from worn-out drums can naturally cure it. Kang Yi of the Ching Dynasty, who hated "foreign devils," acted on the same principle when he prepared to fight them by training a corps of "tiger angels," for the tigers would be able to eat the sheep,* and the angels could subdue the devils. Unfortunately there was only one shop in the whole town which sold this miraculous drug, and that was five *li* from our house. However, this was not like the case of the *Ardisia*, which we groped in the dark to find. After making out his prescription, Mr. Chen Lien-ho gave me earnest and detailed instructions as to where to obtain it.

"I have one medicine," Mr. Chen told my father once, "which applied to the tongue would do you good, I am sure. For the tongue is the intelligent sprout of the heart. . . . It is not expensive either, only two dollars a box. . . ."

My father thought for some time, then shook his head.

"This present treatment may not prove too effective," said Mr. Chen another day. "I think we might ask a diviner if there is not some avenging spirit behind this. . . . A doctor can cure diseases but not fate, isn't that correct? Of course, this may be something that happened in a previous existence. . . ."

My father thought for some time, then shook his head.

* 洋 meaning "foreign" contains 羊 meaning "sheep," and both words are pronounced "yang."

All the best doctors can bring the dead to life, as we know from the placards to this effect which we see when we walk past their doors. But now a concession has been made, for physicians themselves admit: "Western doctors are best at surgery, while Chinese doctors are best at internal medicine." But there was no Western-trained doctor in S— at that time. Indeed, it had never occurred to anyone that there was such a thing in the world as a Western doctor. Hence, whenever anyone fell ill, all we could do was ask the direct descendants of the Yellow Emperor and Chi Po* to cure him. In the days of the Yellow Emperor, wizards and doctors were one; thus right down to the present his disciples can still see ghosts, and believe that "the tongue is the intelligent sprout of the heart." This is the "fate" of Chinese, which not even famous physicians are able to cure.

When he would not apply the efficacious remedy on his tongue, and could not think of any avenging spirit he had wronged, naturally it was no use my father simply eating broken-drum-boluses for over a hundred days. These drum pills proved unable to beat the dropsy, and at last my father lay panting on his bed. We invited Mr. Chen Lien-ho once more — an emergency call this time, for ten silver dollars. Once more, he calmly wrote out a prescription. He discontinued the broken-drum-boluses, however, and the adjuvant was not too mysterious either; so before very long this medicine was ready. But when we poured it between my father's lips, it trickled out again from the side of his mouth.

That ended my dealings with Mr. Chen Lien-ho; but I sometimes saw him in the street being carried

* The Yellow Emperor and Chi Po are legendary figures who were considered the inventors of Chinese medicine. The earliest medical books in China are attributed to them.

swiftly by in his fast sedan-chair with three carriers. I hear he is still in good health, practising medicine and editing a paper on traditional Chinese medicine, engaging in a struggle with those Western-trained doctors who are good for nothing but surgery.

There is indeed a slight difference between the Chinese and Western outlook. I understand that when a filial son in China knows that his parents' end is approaching, he buys several catties of ginseng, boils it and gives it to them, in the hope of prolonging their lives a few more days or even half a day. One of my professors, whose subject was medicine, told me that a doctor's duty was to cure those who could be cured, and see to it that those who could not died without suffering. But this professor, of course, was Western-trained.

Father's breathing became very laboured, until even I could scarcely bear to hear it; but nobody could help him. Sometimes the thought flashed into my mind, "Better if it could all be over quickly. . . ." At once I knew I should not think of such a thing, in fact it was wicked. But at the same time I felt this idea was only proper, for I loved my father dearly. Even today, I still feel the same about it.

That morning Mrs. Yen, who lived in the same compound, came in. An authority on etiquette, she told us not to wait there doing nothing. So we changed his clothes, burnt paper coins and something called the *Kaowang Sutra*,* and put the ashes, wrapped in paper, in his hand. . . .

"Call him!" said Mrs. Yen. "Your father's at his last gasp. Call him quickly!"

* It was believed that by burning this sutra you could lessen the torments of a man in hell. Paper coins were burnt so that the dead man would have money to spend.

"Father! Father!" I called accordingly.

"Louder! He can't hear. Hurry up, can't you?"

"Father! Father!!"

His face, which had been composed, grew suddenly tense again; and he raised his eyelids slightly, as if in pain.

"Call him!" she insisted. "Hurry up and call him!"

"Father!!!"

"What is it? . . . Don't shout. . . . Don't. . . ."

His voice was low, and once more he started panting for breath. It was some time before he recovered his earlier calm.

"Father!!!"

I went on calling him until he breathed his last.

I can still hear my voice as it sounded then. And each time I hear those cries, I feel this was the greatest wrong I ever did my father.

October 7

MR. FUJINO

Tokyo was not so extraordinary after all. When cherry blossom shimmered in Ueno,* from the distance it actually resembled light, pink clouds; but under the flowers you would always find groups of short-term "students from the Ching Empire," their long queues coiled on top of their heads upraising the crowns of their student caps to look like Mount Fujiyama. Others had undone their queues and arranged their hair flat on their heads, so that when their caps were removed it glistened for all the world like the lustrous locks of young ladies; and they would toss their heads too. It was really a charming sight.

In the gatehouse of the Chinese Students' Union there were always some books on sale, and it was worth going there sometimes. In the mornings you could sit and rest in the foreign-style rooms inside. But towards the evening the floor of one room would often be shaken by a deafening tramp of feet, and dust would fill the whole place. If you questioned those in the know, the answer would be: "They are learning ball-room dancing."

Then why not go somewhere else?

So I went to the Medical College in Sendai. Soon after leaving Tokyo I came to a station called Nippori; somehow or other, even now I remember the name. The next place I remember was Mito, where Chu

* A park in Tokyo.

Shun-shui* who was loyal to the Ming Dynasty after its downfall died in exile. Sendai was a small market town, very cold in the winter, with as yet no Chinese students studying there.

No doubt the rarer a thing the higher its value. When Peking cabbage is shipped to Chekiang, it is hung upside-down in the green-grocer's by a red string tied to its root, and given the grand title "Shantung Vegetable." When the aloe which grows wild in Fukien comes to Peking, it is ushered into a hot-house and given the beautiful name "Dragon-Tongue Orchid." In Sendai I too enjoyed such preferential treatment; not only did the school not ask for fees, but several members of the staff even showed great concern over my board and lodging. At first I stayed in an inn next to the gaol, where although the early winter was already quite cold, there were still a good many mosquitoes, so I learned to cover myself completely with the quilt and wrap my clothes round my head, leaving only two nostrils exposed through which to breathe. In this area, shaken by my continuous breathing, mosquitoes could find no place to bite; thus I slept soundly. The food was not bad either. But one of our staff thought that since this inn also catered for the convicts, it was not fitting for me to stay there; and he pleaded with me earnestly time and again. Though I considered the fact that this inn also catered for the convicts had nothing to do with me, I could not ignore his kindness, so I had to look for a more fitting place. Thus I moved to another house a long way from the gaol, where unfortunately I had to drink taro tuber soup every day, which I found rather hard to swallow.

* Chu Shun-shui (1600-1682). After the fall of the Ming Dynasty, he went to Japan to ask for military aid, then remained in Japan as a teacher.

After this I met many new teachers and attended many new lectures. The anatomy course was taught by two professors. First came osteology. There entered a dark, lean instructor with a moustache, who was wearing glasses and carrying under his arm a pile of books, large and small. Having set the books on the table, in measured and most rhythmic tones he introduced himself to the class:

"My name is Genkuro Fujino. . . ."

Some students at the back started laughing. He went on to outline the history of the development of anatomical science in Japan, those books, large and small, being the chief works published on this subject from the earliest time till then. There were first a few books in old-fashioned binding, then some Chinese translations reprinted in Japan. So they had not started translating and studying new medical science any earlier than in China.

Those sitting at the back and laughing were students who had failed the previous term and been kept down, who after one year in the college knew a great many stories. They proceeded to regale the freshmen with the history of every professor. This Mr. Fujino, they said, dressed so carelessly that he sometimes even forgot to put on a tie. Because he shivered all winter in an old overcoat, once when he travelled by train the conductor suspected him of being a pickpocket and warned all the passengers to be on their guard.

What they said was probably true: I myself saw him come to class once without a tie.

A week later, on a Saturday I think, he sent his assistant for me. I found him sitting in his laboratory among skeletons and a number of separate skulls—he was studying skulls at the time and later published a monograph on this subject in the college journal.

"Can you take notes of my lectures?" he asked.

"After a fashion."

"Let me see them."

I gave him the notes I had taken, and he kept them, to return them a day or two later with the instruction that henceforth I should hand them in every week. When I took them back and looked at them, I received a great surprise, and felt at the same time both embarrassed and grateful. From beginning to end my notes had been supplemented and corrected in red ink. Not only had he added a great deal I had missed, he had even corrected every single grammatical mistake. And so it went on till he had taught all the courses for which he was responsible: osteology, angiology, neurology.

Unfortunately, I was not in the least hard-working, and was sometimes most self-willed. I remember once Mr. Fujino called me to his laboratory and showed me a diagram in my notes of the blood vessels of the forearm. Pointing at this, he said kindly:

"Look, you have moved this blood vessel a little out of place. Of course, when moved like this it does look better; but anatomical charts are not works of art, and we have no way of altering real things. I have corrected it for you, and in future you should copy exactly from the blackboard."

I was very stubborn, however. Though I assented, I was thinking:

"My diagram was a good drawing. As for the true facts, of course I can remember them."

After the annual examination I spent the summer enjoying myself in Tokyo. By early autumn, when I went back to the college, the results had long since been published. I came halfway down the list of more than a hundred students, but I had not failed. This

term Mr. Fujino's courses were practical anatomy and topographic anatomy.

After roughly a week of practical anatomy, he sent for me again and looking very gratified, said, still in the most rhythmic tones:

"Having heard what respect the Chinese show to spirits, I was afraid you might be unwilling to dissect corpses. Now my mind is at rest, since this is not the case."

Yet sometimes too, inadvertently, he embarrassed me very much. He had heard that Chinese women had bound feet, but did not know the details; so he wanted to learn from me how it was done, how the bones in the feet were deformed. And he said with a sigh, "I should have to see it to understand. What can it really be like?"

One day the executives of the students' union of my class came to my hostel and asked to borrow my lecture notes. I found them and handed them over, but they merely looked through the notes without taking them away. As soon as they left, however, the postman delivered a bulky envelope, and when I opened it, the first line read:

"Repent!"

This was probably a quotation from the New Testament, but it had recently been used by Tolstoy. It was then the time of the Russo-Japanese War, and Count Tolstoy wrote to both the Russian tsar and the Japanese mikado, opening his letter with this word. The Japanese papers denounced him roundly for his presumption; patriotic youths were most indignant too, though they had been influenced by him without knowing it. The rest of the letter was to the effect that the questions for our anatomy test the previous year had been marked by Mr. Fujino on my lecture

notes, and it was because I knew them beforehand that I was able to pass. The letter was unsigned.

Then I recalled an incident a few days earlier. Because there was to be a meeting of our whole class, the students' executive had written an announcement on the blackboard, concluding with the words: "Please come without fail, and let there be no leakage." The word "leakage" was underlined. Though I thought at the time that this underlining was funny, I paid no attention to it; now I realized it was directed against me too, implying that I had got hold of the questions through some leakage on the part of our teacher.

I reported this to Mr. Fujino. A few students who knew me well were indignant too, and we protested to the executives against their rudeness in examining my notes under another pretext, and demanded that they publish the results of their investigation. So finally the rumour died, the executives tried by every means to recover that anonymous letter, and in the end I returned them their Tolstoyan missive.

China is a weak country, therefore the Chinese must be an inferior people, and for a Chinese to get more than sixty marks could not be due simply to his own efforts. No wonder they suspected me. But soon after this it was my fate to watch the execution of some Chinese. In our second year we had a new course, bacteriology. All the bacterial forms were shown in slides, and if we completed one section before it was time for the class to be dismissed, some news pictures would be shown. Naturally at that time they were all about the Japanese victories over the Russians. But in these lantern slides there were also some Chinese who had acted as spies for the Russians and were captured by the Japanese and shot, while

other Chinese looked on. And there was I, too, in the classroom.

"Banzai!" The students clapped their hands and cheered.

They cheered everything we saw; but to me the cheering that day was unusually discordant. Later when I came back to China I saw idlers watching criminals being shot, who also cheered as if they were drunk. Alas, there is nothing one can do about it. At that time and in that place, however, it made me change my mind.

At the end of my second year I called on Mr. Fujino to tell him I was going to stop studying medicine and leave Sendai. A shadow crossed his face and he seemed on the point of speaking, but then thought better of it.

"I want to study biology, so what you have taught me, sir, will still be useful." As a matter of fact, I had no intention of studying biology; but seeing he looked rather sad I told this lie to comfort him.

"I fear subjects like the anatomy taught to medical students will not be of much help to you in the study of biology," he said with a sigh.

A few days before I left he called me to his house, gave me a photograph on the back of which he had written "Farewell," and said he hoped I would give him one of mine. Since I had no photographs at that time, he told me to send him one later when I had taken one, and to write to him regularly to tell him how I was doing.

After leaving Sendai I did not have a photograph taken for many years, and since I was drifting rather aimlessly and telling him would only disappoint him, I did not even dare write to him. As the months and years slipped by, there was so much to tell that I did not know where to start; so though sometimes I

wanted to write I found it hard to begin, and I have not yet written him a single letter nor sent him a photograph. As far as he is concerned, he must think I have disappeared for good.

But somehow or other I still remember him from time to time, for of all those whom I consider as my teachers he is the one to whom I feel most grateful and who gave me the most encouragement. And I often think: the keen faith he had in me and his indefatigable help were in a limited sense for China, for he wanted China to have modern medical science; but in a larger sense they were for science, for he wanted modern medical knowledge to spread to China. In my eyes he is a great man, and I feel this in my heart, though his name is not known to many people.

I had the lecture notes he corrected bound into three thick volumes and kept them as a permanent souvenir. Unfortunately seven years ago when I was moving house, a case of books broke open on the road and half the contents were lost including these notes. I asked the transport company to make a search, but to no effect. So all I have left is his photograph which hangs on the east wall of my Peking lodging, opposite my desk. At night if I am tired and want to take it easy, when I look up and see his thin, dark face in the lamplight, as if about to speak in rhythmic tones, my better nature asserts itself and my courage returns. Then I light a cigarette, and write some more of those articles so hated and detested by "upright gentlemen."

October 12, 1926

FAN AI-NUNG

In our lodgings in Tokyo, we usually read the papers as soon as we got up. Most students read the *Asahi Shinbun* and the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, while those with a passion for tittle-tattle read the *Niroku Shinbun*. One morning, the first thing our eyes lit on was a telegram from China, much as follows:

"En Ming, Governor of Anhwei, has been assassinated by Jo Shiki Rin. The assassin has been captured."

After the initial shock, all the students brightened up and aired their views. They also tried to work out who the assassin was, and what were the three Chinese characters translated as Jo Shiki Rin. But everyone from Shaohsing who read anything more than textbooks had understood at once. This was Hsu Hsi-lin who, after finishing his studies and returning to China, had been appointed commissioner designate of Anhwei, in charge of police administration—he was just in the position to assassinate the governor.

Everybody went on to prophesy that he would receive the extreme penalty, and his whole clan would be involved. Not long after this, news also reached us that Miss Chiu Chin* had been executed in Shaohsing, and Hsu Hsi-lin's heart had been torn out, fried and

* Chiu Chin 1875-1907. A native of Chekiang, who studied in Japan, she was one of the leaders of the revolutionary movement to overthrow the Ching Dynasty. In 1907, she was captured and killed.

eaten by En Ming's bodyguards. We were furious. Some of us held a secret meeting to raise passage money, for this was where a Japanese ronin would come in useful.* When he was in a jovial mood, after tearing up cuttlefish to go with his wine, he set out to fetch Hsu's family.

As usual, we also held a meeting of fellow provincials to mourn for the revolutionary martyrs and abuse the Manchus. Then someone proposed sending a telegram to Peking to inveigh against the Manchu government's inhumanity. At once the meeting divided into two camps: those in favour of sending a telegram, and those against it. I was in favour, but after I had expressed my opinion, a deep, gruff voice declared:

"Those killed have been killed, those dead have died — what's the use of sending a stinking telegram?"

The speaker was a tall, burly fellow with long hair and more white than black to his eyes, who always seemed to be looking at people contemptuously. Squatting on the mat, he opposed almost all I said. This had struck me before as strange, and I had my eye on him, but only now did I ask:

"Who was that last speaker, who's so cold?"

Someone who knew him told me: "That's Fan Ai-nung, one of Hsu Hsi-lin's students."

This was outrageous — the fellow was simply not human! His teacher had been murdered, yet he did not even dare send a telegram. Thereupon I absolutely insisted on sending one, and began to argue with him. The result was that those in favour of sending a telegram were in the majority, and he had to give way. The next thing was to vote for someone to draft it.

* The Ching government was so afraid of foreigners that it would do nothing to thwart a Japanese ruffian.

"Why trouble to vote?" he asked. "Of course it should be the one who proposed sending a telegram."

I was sure this remark was also aimed at me, though it was not unreasonable. However, I declared it was essential that a composition of such a tragic nature be written by someone thoroughly familiar with the life of the martyr, for the fact that he had a closer relationship and felt more distressed and indignant than other people would certainly make his writing much more moving. So I began to argue with him again. The result was that neither he nor I drafted it. I forget who consented to draft it. The next thing was that everyone left except the man drawing up the telegram and one or two helpers who would send it off when it was written.

After that I always found this Fan Ai-nung unnatural, and most detestable. I had formerly thought the most detestable people in the world were the Manchus, but now I realized they were still secondary: the primary offender was Fan Ai-nung. If China had no revolution, no more need be said on the matter. If there was a revolution, the first thing to do was to root out Fan Ai-nung.

Later, however, my views on this subject seem by degrees to have weakened, to be finally forgotten, and after that we never met again. Not till the year before the revolution, when I was teaching in my hometown. There at the end of the spring, I think, I suddenly saw a man in a friend's house whose face looked very familiar. After staring at each other for not more than two or three seconds, we both exclaimed:

"Why, you're Fan Ai-nung!"

"Why, you're Lu Hsun!"

I don't know why, but we both started laughing at that — laughing at ourselves and regretting the days that had gone. His eyes were still the same; but,

strangely enough, though only a few years had passed, he already had some white hairs. Or maybe his hair had been white all the time, only I had never noticed. Wearing a very old cloth jacket and worn-out cloth shoes, he looked extremely shabby. Speaking of his experiences, he told me he had run out of money later, so that he could not continue his studies but had to come home. After his return he had been despised, rejected and persecuted — virtually no place would have him. Now he was taking refuge in the country, teaching a few small boys to make a meagre living. But he sometimes felt so disgusted that he took a boat to town.

He told me also that he now liked drinking, so we drank. After that, whenever he came to town he would look me up, till we knew each other very well. In our cups we often said such crazy, senseless things that even my mother would laugh when she happened to hear us. One day I suddenly remembered that meeting of our fellow-provincials in Tokyo.

"Why did you do nothing but oppose me that day, as if deliberately?" I asked him.

"Don't you know? I always disliked you — not just I, but all of us."

"Did you know who I was before that?"

"Of course. When we arrived at Yokohama, didn't you come with Chen Tse-ying to meet us? You shook your head over us contemptuously — don't you remember that?"

After a little thought I remembered, although it had happened seven or eight years ago. Chen Tse-ying had called for me, saying we must go to Yokohama to meet some fellow-provincials who were coming to study in Japan. As soon as the steamer arrived I saw a large group of probably more than a dozen of them. Once ashore, they took their baggage to the custom

house, and while looking through their cases the customs officer suddenly found a pair of embroidered slippers for a woman with bound feet, and set aside his public duties to pick these up and examine them curiously. I was very annoyed, and thought: "What fools these fellows must be, to bring those slippers with them!" Without knowing what I was doing, I must have shaken my head disapprovingly. The inspection over, we sat for a short time in a hotel, then boarded the train. To my surprise, this flock of students started deferring to each other in the railway carriage. A wanted B to take this seat, B insisted on giving it up to C; and before they were through with this ceremonial the train started with a lurch, so that three or four of them promptly fell over. I was very annoyed again, and thought to myself: "Even the seats on trains they have to divide according to precedence. . . ." Without knowing what I was doing, I must have shaken my head disapprovingly again. But one of that deferential group, I realized now, was Fan Ai-nung. And in addition to Fan, I am ashamed to say, were the revolutionary martyrs Chen Po-ping, who was killed in battle in Anhwei, and Ma Tsung-han, who was murdered. There were one or two others as well, who were thrown into dark cells not to see the light of day till after the revolution, and who still bear the scars of their torture. Yet without an inkling of this, shaking my head I shipped them all to Tokyo. Though Hsu Hsi-lin had travelled on the same boat, he was not on this train, for he and his wife had landed at Kobe to go on by land.

I believed I must have shaken my head twice, and did not know which time they had noticed it. Since all was bustle and noise while they offered seats to each other, while all was quiet during the customs inspection, it must surely have been in the custom

house. When I questioned Ai-nung, I found this was the case.

"I really can't understand why you took such things with you. Whose were they?"

"They belonged to Mrs. Hsu, of course." He fixed me with his eyes, which were mostly whites.

"In Tokyo she'd have to pretend to have big feet. So why take them?"

"Who knows? Ask *her*."

As winter approached we grew more hard up; still, we went on drinking and joking. Then suddenly came the Wuchang uprising,* and after that Shaohsing was freed. The following day Ai-nung came to town in a felt cap of the type farmers often wear. I had never seen him with such a smiling face.

"Let's not drink today, Hsun. I want to see free Shaohsing. Come out with me."

So we walked through the streets, and saw white flags everywhere. But though outwardly all was changed, beneath the surface all went on as before; for this was a military government organized by a few of the old-style gentry. The chief shareholder in the railway company was head of the administration, the money-lender had become director of the arsenal. . . . And this military government did not last long, for as soon as a few youngsters raised an outcry, Wang Chin-fa came in with his troops from Hangchow. In fact, he might have come even without the outcry. After his arrival, he was surrounded by a crowd of idlers and new members of the revolutionary party, and reigned supreme as Military Governor Wang. In less than ten days most of his men in the yamen, who

* This took place on October 10, 1911, and was the beginning of the 1911 Revolution.

had arrived in cotton clothes, were wearing fur-lined gowns although it was not yet cold.

My new rice bowl was the job of principal of the normal school, and Governor Wang gave me two hundred dollars to run the school. Ai-nung was supervisor of studies. He still wore his cloth gown, but did not drink very much, and seldom had time to chat. Since he gave classes in addition to his administrative duties, he was very busy indeed.

"Wang Chin-fa and his lot are no good either," indignantly announced a young visitor who had attended my lectures the previous year. "We want to start a newspaper to keep a check on them. But we'll have to use your name, sir, as one of the sponsors. Another is Mr. Chen Tse-ying, and another is Mr. Sun Teh-ching.* We know you won't refuse, since it's for the public good."

I gave my consent. Two days later I saw a leaflet announcing the appearance of this paper, and sure enough there were three sponsors. Five days later the newspaper came out. It began by denouncing the military government and its members, after which it denounced the governor and his relatives, fellow-provincials and concubines. . . .

After more than ten days of such abuse, word came to my house that because we had tricked money out of the governor and denounced him, he was going to send a gunman to shoot us.

Nobody took this seriously except my mother, who was very worried and begged me not to go out. I went out as usual, however, explaining to her that Wang Chin-fa would not be coming to shoot us; for although he came out of the bandits' school, it was not

* An enlightened landlord, who joined the anti-Manchu revolutionary movement.

such a simple matter killing people. Besides, the money I took from him was to run the school—he should at least know that—he was only trying to frighten us.

Sure enough, no one came to shoot us. When I wrote and asked for more funds, I received another two hundred dollars. But Governor Wang seemed to be rather offended, for he informed me: "This is the last time!"

Ai-nung heard some fresh news, however, which upset me very much. The reference to "tricking" money had not meant the school funds but a separate sum given to the newspaper office. After the paper had come out for several days filled with abuse, Wang Chin-fa sent a man there to pay them five hundred dollars. Then our youngsters held a meeting.

The first question was: "Shall we accept this or not?"

The decision was: "Accept it."

The second question was: "Shall we go on denouncing him after accepting this?"

The decision was: "We shall."

The reason was: "Once we have accepted his money, he becomes a shareholder; and if a shareholder behaves badly, of course we must denounce him."

I went straight to the newspaper office to find out whether this was true or not. It was. I reproached them mildly for accepting the governor's money, but the man who was called the accountant was offended.

"Why shouldn't a newspaper accept shares?" he demanded.

"These aren't shares. . . ."

"If they aren't shares, what are they?"

I did not say any more. I had enough experience of the world for that. If I had pointed out that this was involving us, he would have abused me for caring so

much for my worthless life that I was unwilling to sacrifice myself for the public good; or the next day the paper might have carried an account of how I had trembled in my fear of death.

But then, by a fortunate coincidence, Hsu Chi-fu sent me a letter urging me to go at once to Nanking. Ai-nung was all in favour, though extremely depressed as well.

"Things have grown so bad again, you can't stay here," he said. "You'd better leave at once. . . ."

I understood what he left unsaid, and decided to go to Nanking. First I went to the governor's yamen to tender my resignation, which was naturally accepted, then a snivelling functionary was sent to the school to take over. Having handed over the accounts and the ten cents and two coppers in hand, I ceased to be the principal. My successor was Fu Li-chen, head of the Confucian League.

I heard the end of the newspaper affair two or three weeks after reaching Nanking — the office had been smashed up by the soldiery. Since Chen Tse-ying was in the country, he was all right; but Sun Teh-ching, who happened to be in town, received a bayonet wound in his thigh. He flew into a fury. Of course, one couldn't blame him — it was rather painful. After his fury subsided, he took off his clothes and had a photograph taken to show the wound which was about an inch across; he also wrote an account of what had happened, which he circulated everywhere, to expose the tyranny of this warlord government. I doubt if anyone has kept that photograph. It was so small that the wound was practically invisible, and without an explanation anyone seeing it would be bound to take it for a nudist photograph of some rather eccentric and romantic fellow. Indeed, if it came to the notice of

the warlord general, Sun Chuan-fang,* it would very likely be banned.

By the time I moved from Nanking to Peking, the principal who was head of the Confucian League had contrived to remove Ai-nung from his post as supervisor of studies. He was once more the Ai-nung of pre-revolutionary days. I wanted to find a small post for him in Peking, which was what he longed for, but there was no opening. Later he went to live on a friend, and I often heard from him. He grew poorer and poorer, and sounded more and more bitter. At last he was forced to leave this friend's house and drift from place to place. Before long I heard from a fellow-provincial that he had fallen into the river and been drowned.

I suspected he had committed suicide. For he was an excellent swimmer: it would not be easy for him to drown.

At night, sitting in the hostel feeling thoroughly depressed, I doubted whether this news could be true; but somehow I still felt it must be reliable, although I had received no confirmation. There was nothing I could do but write four poems which were printed later in some paper, but which I have now nearly forgotten. All I can remember are six lines of one poem. The first four were:

Drinking, we talked of everything under the sun;
You were only a moderate drinker,
And now that the entire world is drunk
A moderate drinker deserves to be forgotten.

The two lines in the middle have slipped my memory, but the last two were:

* A northern warlord who believed that the use of human models in art schools was immoral, and prohibited this practice.

Old friends have gone like clouds that drift
away,

And I am a speck of light dust.

Later, when I went home, I learned more details of the story. First, Ai-nung could find no work of any description, because everybody disliked him. He was very hard up indeed, but he went on drinking whenever friends treated him. He had very little to do with other people by this time, and the only ones he saw much of were a few rather young men he had got to know afterwards; but they did not want to hear his complaints all the time — they liked his jokes better.

"I may get a telegram tomorrow," he used to say. "When I open it, I'll find Lu Hsun has sent for me."

One day, a few new friends invited him to go by boat to watch an opera. It was after midnight by the time they started back, and there was high wind and rain. He was drunk, yet he insisted on standing on the bulwarks. And when his friends protested, he would not listen to them. He assured them he could not fall. Fall he did, though, and although he could swim he did not come to the surface.

The next day they recovered his body. They found him standing upright in a creek where water chestnuts grew.

To this day I do not know whether he lost his balance or committed suicide.

He had no money at all when he died, but he left behind a widow with a young daughter. Some people thought of starting a fund for his daughter's future schooling; but as soon as this was proposed, various members of his clan started squabbling as to who should control this sum, although it had not yet been collected. Then everyone was so disgusted that the scheme just came to nothing.

I wonder how his only daughter is faring now? If she is studying, she ought to have graduated from secondary school by this time.

November 18

MY FIRST TEACHER

I cannot remember in what old book I read of a Confucian moralist—a celebrity, of course—who thundered against Buddhism all his life, yet gave his son the name Monk. One day he was asked the reason. “This is just to show my contempt,” he replied. His interrogator was silenced and withdrew.

In fact, this moralist was prevaricating; for he named his son Monk for superstitious reasons. China abounds in monsters and ghosts who like to murder people of promise, especially children; while the second-rate they pass over quite placidly. As for people like monks, from the monks’ point of view since they may become bodhisattvas—though not in every case—they certainly rank very high; but from the literati’s point of view, since monks have no homes and cannot become officials they should rank as second-rate. The monsters and ghosts conceived by the literati naturally hold the same views as the literati; hence they do not trouble monks. The idea is the same as calling children by such names as Pussy or Puppy: it helps to keep them alive.

Another way of warding off ghosts is to take a monk as teacher, which means that a child is dedicated to a monastery, although not sent to live there. I was the first boy in the Chou family, and since “what is rare is prized” my father feared that I might show promise and die young, therefore before I was one year old I was carried to Changching Monastery and

a monk was chosen as my master. Whether presents were given to the master or contributions made to the monastery I do not know at all. All I know is that this is how I received my Buddhist name Chang-keng, which I later used occasionally as a pen-name, and in that short story "In the Wine Shop" gave to the ne'er-do-well who bullied his niece. There was also a priestly garment, the "coat of many patches," which should have been sewn out of all sorts of rag. Mine, however, was made of olive-shaped pieces of different coloured silk, and I could wear it only on special occasions. There was something else called a "halter," on which were suspended various little objects like a calendar, a mirror, a silver sieve and so forth. This was supposed to have power to ward off evil.

Indeed, these precautions appear to have had some effect: so far I have not died.

But though I still have my Buddhist name, my coat and halter have long since disappeared. A few years ago when I went back to Peking, my mother gave me the silver sieve, the only memento left of my childhood days. When I looked at it carefully, the sieve was little more than an inch across; in the middle was a *yin* and *yang* design,* on top there was a book, below a scroll, and appended to the two sides were a tiny ruler, scissors, abacus and balance. The truth suddenly dawned on me: evil spirits in China fear precise and clear-cut things which admit of no ambiguity. Out of curiosity last year I asked at a silver-smith's in Shanghai and bought two of these talismans. They were almost identical with the one I had, only

* A design symbolizing the universe. *Yin* represents the female or negative element, and *yang* the male or positive element in nature.

the number of small appendages varied. It is very odd indeed that, though more than half a century has passed, the nature of evil spirits still has not changed, and the same talismans are used against them today. I realize, however, that grown-up people cannot use these clear-cut things. In fact, to do so would be dangerous.

But all this reminds me of my first teacher half a century ago. Even today I do not know his Buddhist name, but one and all addressed him as Master Lung. A tall, thin man with a thin, long face, he had high cheekbones and almond-shaped eyes. A monk should not grow a moustache, yet he had a small moustache which drooped at each end. He was pleasant to everyone including me, for he did not make me chant a single sutra nor did he teach me any Buddhist precepts. As for him, when he wore the chief monk's mantle or put on the vairochana headdress* to chant "Let all lonely spirits who have no sacrifice come to receive sweet dew," he was thoroughly dignified. Usually, though, he did not chant sutras, for he was the abbot in charge of all administrative matters in the monastery. In point of fact—of course this was merely my view—he was simply one of the laity with a shaven head.

This being the case, my teacher had a wife. As a rule, monks should not have wives, but my teacher had one. In the middle of the hall at home we had a tablet inscribed in gilt letters with the five dignitaries to whom we owe absolute respect and obedience: "Heaven, Earth, the Sovereign, the Parents, and the Teacher." As I was the disciple and he the teacher, I was not in a position to censure him. Indeed, at

* Vairochana is the name of an arhat. This type of headdress is worn during sacrifice to spirits.

that time I did not dream of censuring him; I simply thought his conduct a little odd. Still I was very fond of my teacher's wife. As far as I can remember, she must have been about forty when first I saw her, a portly matron in black gauze jacket and trousers enjoying the cool breeze in her courtyard, whose children came to play with me; and sometimes there were fruit and cakes to eat—of course that was one of my chief reasons for liking her. In the words of that eminent professor, Chen Yuan, it was a case of "she who feeds me is my mother." Such an attitude is most despicable.

But my teacher's wife had a rather unusual romance. "Romance" is the modern expression; in those days in our out-of-the-way part of the world we called it "pairing off." Since this expression appears in the *Book of Songs*, its origin is most ancient, dating from not long after the days of King Wen, King Wu and the Duke of Chou.* Later, it seems to have lost some of its pristine dignity, but that need not concern us. At all events, it seems that when Master Lung was young he was a most handsome and competent monk, who was very well connected and knew all sorts of people. One day a religious drama was performed in the village, and since he knew the actors he went up to the stage to play the gong for them. With his well-shaved head and brand-new robe, he must have looked magnificent. But country folk are, generally speaking, rather conservative. Since they considered the function of monks was simply to chant sutras and perform masses, some of the audience started swearing, and my teacher, who would not accept an insult in silence, began swearing back at them. Then a battle began, a hail of sugar-cane stumps assailed the

* That is, the eleventh century B.C.

stage, some brave fellows made as if to launch an attack, and as he was one against many he had to withdraw. But as he retreated the others were bound to pursue; thus he had to take refuge hastily in a house. And that house was occupied by a young widow. I am not quite clear as to what happened after; but later, at any rate, she became my teacher's wife.

Though the magazine *Wind of the Universe* has been published for some time, I had no opportunity of reading it till a few days ago when I saw the Special Spring Number. In this there is an essay by Mr. Chu-tang entitled "Heroes cannot be judged by their success or failure," which I found most interesting. The writer believes that the Chinese refusal to judge heroes by their failure or success "undoubtedly shows a lofty idealism . . . yet in human society this is very harmful. . . . If we support the weak and resist the strong, it means we never want to have any strong men; while the worship of the defeated is a refusal to recognize successful heroes. . . . Recently it has often been said that the Chinese are adepts at assimilating others, hence the Kitai, Golden Tartars, Mongols and Manchus never really conquered China; but actually this is simply a type of inertia and reluctance to accept new institutions."

I shall not discuss here the way to reform this inertia, for plenty of people are finding solutions for us. I wish merely to affirm that the reason the young widow became my master's wife is because she too was guilty of refusing to judge heroes by their success or failure. Since the countryside had no living heroes like Yueh Fei or Wen Tien-hsiang,* when a handsome monk fled from the stage under a hail of sugar-cane stumps, he was a bona fide defeated hero. Then, dis-

*Patriotic generals of the Sung Dynasty.

covering in herself the traditional inertia, she began to admire him. She felt towards his pursuers as our ancestors felt towards the mighty forces of the Kitai, the Golden Tartars, the Mongols or the Manchus, and would not recognize successful heroes. The result in history, as Mr. Chu-tang has pointed out, was that "without a display of might the Chinese would not submit." Hence the "ten days' terror at Yangchow" and the "three massacres at Chiating"* simply served them right. It seems, however, the country folk this time scattered without any display of might. Of course, they may not have known he was hiding in her house.

So it came to pass that I had three elder brothers in religion and two younger. Brother Number One was a poor man's son who had either been given or sold to the monastery. The other four were all my master's sons, and it did not strike me as strange at the time that a big monk should beget small monks. Brother Number One was a bachelor, but Number Two had a wife and children of his own, though he tried to keep this from me, from which we can see that his religious attainments were far below those of his father, my teacher. In any case, these brothers were so much older than I that we practically never mixed.

Third Brother was probably my senior by some ten years, yet we became the best of friends and I often felt concerned for him. I remember the time when he took the priestly vows. As he did not read many sutras, I feared he could not have a profound understanding of the Mahayana doctrine, and when two rows of moxa punk were placed on his freshly shaven forehead and he was cauterized I was sure he would

* These were bloody massacres of the people by the Manchus in 1645.

shout with pain. Since there would be many pious believers at the ceremony, this would look extremely bad, and I as his younger brother in religion would also lose face. That simply would not do! The thought of this preyed on my mind as much as if I were taking the vows myself. But my master after all proved the profundity of his religious attainment. He summoned Third Brother that same morning and, instead of lecturing him on discipline or doctrine, he simply said to him sternly:

"You must stick it out at all costs, and be sure not to cry or call out. If you do, your head will burst open and you will die!"

This fearful warning was in truth more effective than the Saddharmapundarika Sutra or the Mahayana Sraddhotpada Sastra, for who wants to die? The ceremony was solemnly carried out. Though his eyes were moister than usual, it was a fact that not a sound did Third Brother utter all the time the two rows of moxa punk were burning on his head. This tremendous load lifted from my mind, I gave a sigh of relief, while those pious believers put their palms together in admiration, praising Buddha and joyfully making their donations before they prostrated themselves and left.

When a man in holy orders takes priestly vows and is promoted from acolyte to monk, it is like our laymen's ceremony of coming of age, when a boy becomes a man. A man likes to "take a wife," and a monk cannot help but think of women too. A common fallacy among those who have never had a Buddhist teacher or made friends with monks is to imagine that monks think only of Sakyamuni or Maitreya. The monasteries certainly contain monks who practise religion, do without women and eat no meat, my Number One Brother being a case in point. But monks

like this are queer, cold misanthropists, who always look unhappy and are angry if you touch their fans or books; so people dare not approach them. Thus all my monkish friends either had women or declared they wanted them, either ate meat or declared they wanted to eat it.

I was not surprised then that Third Brother longed for a woman, and I knew what sort of woman was his ideal. You may think he was longing for some nun, but such was not the case. It is doubly difficult for a monk to pair off with a nun. No, he was longing for the daughter or young wife in a wealthy family; and the go-between in this love affair, or one-sided love affair, was a "knot." When rich folk in our district had a funeral they held a mass every seven days, and on one of these days the ceremony of "undoing the knots" was performed. For since the deceased must have made enemies during his lifetime and some of their enmity towards him must remain, after his death all knots of enmity had to be untied. This was done in the following manner: After the chanting of sutras and the performance of rituals that evening, before the shrine they set plates of food and flowers, as well as one plate of knots. These were made of hemp or white string threaded with a dozen coppers then fastened together in the shape of butterflies, geometric designs or other intricate forms very hard to untie. The monks sat round a table chanting sutras as they undid these knots; and when the knots were undone, the coppers found their way into the pockets of the monks while all the dead man's knots of enmity were untied. It seems an odd idea, but that was the general custom and no one thought it strange. I suppose that was a kind of inertia too.

But not all these knots were untied as a layman might expect. If a monk thought some were specially

well made, he might fall in love with them; or if some were fastened so tight they were difficult to untie, he might take a dislike to them. In either case, the whole thing might be slipped into the monk's big sleeves, leaving the unhappy deceased with his knots of enmity still tied to suffer in hell. When the monks brought such treasures back to the monastery, they kept them and fondled them from time to time, just as some of us take a special interest in the work of women writers. As they enjoyed the handiwork it was natural they should think of the maker. Who could have tied this knot? A man could not have done it, nor a servant; only the daughter of the house or the young wife would be so skilful. Since monks are not as sublime as men of letters, when they looked at the object they could not help thinking of its maker and indulging in certain vain and frivolous thoughts. But though a monk was my teacher I am still a layman myself; hence I cannot fully understand their psychology.

I merely remember that, as a result of considerable pressure, Third Brother gave me a few of these knots. Some of them were really most intricately fashioned, while others after being tied had been soaked in water and beaten hard with scissor handles or the like, so that no monk could possibly undo them. To undo these knots was to help the deceased, but here things were made hard for the monks. I really could not understand what was in the minds of those daughters and young wives. Not till twenty years afterwards, when I had studied a little medicine, did I realize that they derived some kind of sadistic satisfaction from this cruelty to monks. That the frustration of women confined to the inner chambers should be transmitted as if by radio to monks is something, I suspect, which our Confucian moralists never foresaw.

Later Third Brother also took a wife. Whether she was daughter of a wealthy family, nun or maid "of low degree" I do not know, for he kept this a secret too, his religious attainments falling far short of his father's. By that time I was growing up myself and had picked up somewhere such ancient sayings as: "A monk should observe the rules of the monastery." I quoted these to tease him. To my surprise, he was not in the least embarrassed, but glared at me like a Buddhist guardian angel.

"If a monk has no wife," he roared, "whence come the small bodhisattvas?"

This is known in Buddhist lore as "the roar of the lion." It made me see the truth and silenced me. Of course I had seen great Buddhas over ten feet high in the monasteries, as well as small bodhisattvas a few feet or few inches high; but I had never wondered at this discrepancy in size. After this roar I thoroughly understood the need for monks to have wives, and no longer entertained doubts as to the origin of those small bodhisattvas. But after that it became rather difficult to find Third Brother, for this holy man now had three homes: the monastery, the house of his parents, and the house where he kept his wife.

My master died about forty years ago. Most of my brothers in religion have become abbots, and though still friends we have long been out of touch. However, I am sure they must have produced a great many small bodhisattvas, some of whom must have also produced small bodhisattvas of their own.

April 1, 1936

THE HANGING WOMAN

I believe it was Wang Sze-jen at the end of the Ming Dynasty who said: "Kuaichj* is the home of revenge, not a place that tolerates filth." This reflects great credit on us Shaohsing people, and it gives me great pleasure to hear or quote these words. It is not strictly true, however, for really any description can be applied to our district.

It is a fact, none the less, that the average citizen of Shaohsing does not hate revenge as much as those "progressive" writers in Shanghai. Just look at our art, for example. In our opera we have created an avenging spirit, lovelier and stronger than all other ghosts. This is the Hanging Woman. To my mind Shaohsing can boast two unique ghosts. One is Wu Chang, so helpless yet careless in the face of death, whom I had the honour of introducing to my fellow-countrymen in *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*. Today I will speak of the other.

The Hanging Woman may be a local name, which would have to be expressed in standard speech as "the ghost of a woman who died by hanging." The truth is, when we talk of ghosts who died by hanging we naturally assume they are females, for there have always been more women than men who met their death in this way. There is a spider which suspends itself in mid air from one thread which is called the

* The ancient name for Shaohsing.

Hanging Woman in *Erh Ya*. This shows that as early as the Chou or Han Dynasty most of those who hanged themselves belonged to the feminine sex; hence the spider was not called the Hanging Man nor given a neuter gender and called the Hanging Creature. But during the performance of a Great Drama or Maudgalyayana Drama you hear the name Hanging Woman from the audience, as well as the name Hanging Goddess. I know of no other case in which a ghost who died an unnatural death has been deified; and this shows how much the people love and respect her. Why do they call her the Hanging Woman then? The reason for this is simple: in the opera there is also a Hanging Man.

The Shaohsing I knew was the Shaohsing of forty years ago. Since there were no high officials there at that time, there were no private performances in the houses of the great. All performances were a kind of religious drama. The gods in their shrines were the guests of honour, while we mortals owed them thanks for this opportunity to watch. For the Great Drama or Maudgalyayana Drama, a yet more comprehensive audience was invited. That the gods came goes without saying; but ghosts were invited too, especially those avenging spirits who had died unnatural deaths. This made the occasion more exciting and solemn. I think it very interesting that the presence of these avenging spirits should make the occasion more exciting and solemn.

I may have mentioned elsewhere that though the Great Drama and the Maudgalyayana Drama were both performed for gods, mortals and spirits, they were none the less very different. One difference lay in the actors: in the former they were professionals, in the latter amateurs—peasants and workers assembled for the occasion. Another difference lay in

the repertoire. the former consisting of many operas, the latter of just the one *Maudgalyayana Rescues His Mother*. Both types, however, opened with the same "Summoning of the Spirits," ghosts put in an appearance from time to time, and in the end the good men went to heaven and the evil-doers to hell.

Before the performance started you could see this was no ordinary religious opera, for on both sides of the stage hung paper hats for the gods and ghosts to wear. So when an old stager had leisurely had his supper, drunk his tea, and strolled across to watch, he need only look at the hats left hanging there to know which gods or ghosts had already appeared. Since these operas started rather early, the "Summoning of the Spirits" would be played at sunset; hence by the time supper was over the performance would be fairly well advanced; but the beginning was by no means the best. Actually, the only spirits summoned were those who had died unnatural deaths. Of course this included all those fallen in battle, as we see from the ode by Chu Yuan:*

 Their spirits deathless, though their bodies
 slain,

 Proudly as kings among the ghosts shall reign.

When the Ming Dynasty fell, many Shaohsing people revolted against the invaders and were killed, and they were called rebels in the Ching Dynasty. Their gallant spirits too were summoned on this occasion. In the gloaming, some dozen horses stood at the foot of the stage while an actor masqueraded as the ghostly king with a blue face painted with lines resembling scales, and a steel prong in his hand. There were also about a dozen ghostly soldiers, and for these parts ordinary boys could volunteer. In my teens I served

* An ancient poet, believed to have lived from 340-278 B.C.

as such a volunteer ghost. We scrambled up the stage to offer our services; then they smeared some colours on our faces and handed each of us a steel prong. When we numbered about a dozen, we rushed to the horses and galloped to the many deserted graves in the open country. There we described three circles, alighted and cried aloud, then lunged at the grave mounds again and again with our prongs. This done we seized the prongs and galloped back, mounted the stage, gave a great shout together, and hurled the prongs to stand transfixed in the floor. Our work now at an end, we washed our faces, left the stage and were free to go home. Of course, if we were found out by our parents we could hardly escape a beating with the split bamboo (the most common implement in Shao-hsing for beating children), to punish us for mixing with ghosts and to vent the parental relief that we had not fallen off the horses and killed ourselves. Luckily I was never found out. I may have been protected by evil spirits.

This ceremony signified that the manifold lonely ghosts and avenging spirits had now come with the ghostly king and his ghostly soldiers to watch the performance with the rest of us. There was no need to worry, though. These ghosts were on their best behaviour, and would not make the least trouble all this night. So the opera started and slowly unfolded, the human beings interspersed with apparitions: the ghost who died by fire, the ghost who was drowned, the one who expired in an examination cell, the one eaten by a tiger. . . . Boys could have these parts too if they wanted, but few boys cared to play these insignificant ghosts, nor was the audience much impressed by them. When the time came for the Hanging Ghost Dance, however, the atmosphere grew much more tense. As the trumpet wailed on the stage, a noose of cloth about

two-fifths the height of the stage was let down from the central beam. The spectators held their breath, and out rushed a man with a painted face wearing nothing but short pants. This was the Hanging Man. He dashed to the pendent cloth and, like a spider clinging to its thread or weaving its web, swung himself to and fro, worming in and out of the noose. He used the cloth to suspend himself by various parts of his body: the waist, the sides, the thighs, the elbows, the knees, the nape of the neck . . . in forty-nine (seven times seven) different places. Last of all he came to the neck. But he did not actually fasten his neck in the noose: instead he gripped the cloth with both hands and stretched his neck through it, then jumped down and made off. This dance was most difficult, and the Hanging Man's was the only part in the Maudgalyayana Drama for which a professional had to be engaged.

The old folk told me then this dance was extremely dangerous, for it might cause the genuine Hanging Man to appear. So behind the scenes there had to be someone dressed as Wang the Controller of Ghosts, who held up one hand in a magic sign, grasped a mace in the other, and fixed his eyes on a mirror reflecting the stage. If he saw two Hanging Men in the mirror, one must be the real ghost. In that case, he had to leap out at once and beat the false one with his mace so that he fell off the stage. As soon as the false one fell off the stage he had to run to the river and wash the paint off his face, then squeeze his way into the crowd to watch the performance before going slowly home. If beaten down too slowly, he would hang to death on the stage. If he washed off his paint too slowly, the real ghost would recognize him and follow him. This squeezing into the crowd and watching his own people playing on the stage is like the case of a

high official who resigns and must embrace Buddhism or go abroad to study foreign conditions—a ceremony of transition which cannot be dispensed with.

After this came the Hanging Woman Dance. Of course this too was preceded by mournful trumpeting. The next moment, the curtain was raised and she emerged. She wore a red jacket and a long black sleeveless coat, her long hair was in disorder, two strings of paper coins hung from her neck, and with lowered head and drooping hands she wound her way across the stage. According to the old stagers, she was tracing out the heart sign; but why she should do this I do not know. I do know, though, why she wore red. From Wang Chung's *Lun Heng** I learned that the ghosts of the Han Dynasty were red. In later pictures or descriptions, however, ghosts do not seem to have any definite colour, while in drama the only one to wear red is this Hanging Goddess. This is easy to understand. When she hanged herself she intended to become an avenging spirit, and red, as one of the more vital colours, would make it easier for her to approach living creatures. . . . Even today, some of the women of Shaohsing powder their faces and change into red gowns before hanging themselves. Of course, suicide is an act of cowardice, and to speak of avenging spirits is unscientific; but these are all foolish women who cannot even read or write, so I hope our "progressive" writers and "fighting" heroes will not be too angry with them. I fear you may make utter fools of yourselves.

Only when she shook back her dishevelled hair could people see her face clearly: a round, chalk-white face, thick, pitchblack eyebrows, dark eyelids, crimson lips. I have heard that in the opera of some prefec-

* A collection of essays written during the first century A.D.

tures in eastern Chekiang the Hanging Goddess also has a false tongue several inches long lolling out; but we do not have this in Shaohsing. It is not that I want to favour my own district, but I do think it is better without the tongue. And compared with the present fashion of slightly darkening the eyelids, we can say her make-up is more thoroughgoing and charming. Only her lower lip should curve slightly upwards to form a triangular mouth, and this is not bad-looking either. If in the dim light after midnight a woman with a powdered face and red lips like this appeared faintly in the distance, old as I am I might still run over to look at her; though I doubt if I would be tempted to hang myself. She shrugged her shoulders slightly, looked around and listened as if startled, happy or angry. At last in mournful tones she began singing slowly:

"I was a daughter of the Yang family,
Ah me, unhappy me! . . ."

What followed I do not know. Even these lines I have just learned from Keh-shih.* At any rate, the drift of her song was that she had become a child-bride and been so cruelly treated that she was forced to hang herself. As her song ended there was the sound of distant wailing from another woman who was weeping bitterly over her wrongs and preparing to kill herself. The Hanging Woman was overjoyed to hear this, and wanted to make this woman take her place. Just then, however, out jumped the Hanging Man and declared the new ghost must take *his* place instead. From words they fell to blows, and naturally the weaker sex was outmatched; but luckily at this juncture Wang the Controller of Ghosts appeared on the scene. Though not a handsome man, he was

* Chou Chien-jen, Lu Hsun's younger brother.

a fervent supporter of the feminine cause; so with one blow of his mace he killed the Hanging Man, setting the Hanging Woman free to go about her business.

The old folk told me that in ancient times the same number of men hanged themselves as women; but after the Controller of Ghosts killed the Hanging Man, few men committed suicide in this way. Again, in ancient times there were forty-nine (seven times seven) different places on the body by which you could hang yourself; it was only after the Controller of Ghosts killed the Hanging Man that the neck became the single fatal spot. Chinese ghosts are peculiar this way: after becoming ghosts they can die again. In our district we call this sort the ghosts of ghosts. But if the ghostly Hanging Man was already killed, why need we fear his appearing during the dance? I cannot understand the logic of this, and when I asked the old folk they could give no satisfactory explanation either.

I must say Chinese ghosts have one bad habit, that is this practice of finding substitutes. This is pure selfishness. If not for this, we could mix with them quite at our ease. This being the custom, however, even the Hanging Woman is no exception, and sometimes in her search for a successor she forgets to take revenge. In Shaohsing we cook rice in iron pans over firewood or straw. When the soot beneath the pan becomes too thick, the heat will not penetrate; thus we often find the soot scraped off on the ground. It always lies scattered, though, for no country woman will take the easy way of setting the pan upside down on the ground and scraping the soot off round it to form a black circle. This is because the Hanging Goddess makes her noose to lure folk to death out of just such soot. To scatter the soot is some sort of passive resistance, aimed merely at preventing her

finding a substitute, not for any fear of her taking revenge. Even if the oppressed are not bent on taking revenge, at least they do not fear lest others take revenge on them. Only those assassins and their stooges who secretly suck men's blood and devour their flesh will give such advice as "Do not take revenge," or "Forgive past injuries." This year I have seen more clearly into the secret thoughts of these creatures with human faces.

September 19 and 20, 1936

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